Pedagogy of Necrosis

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Pedagogy of Necrosis

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Summary

A new case has Will feeling an uncomfortable affinity with the killer.

Notes

This story functions as a sequel to Fall With You in Burning Darkness, but can be read as a stand-alone story. Will knows Hannibal is the Chesapeake Ripper and is ok with it!

Chapter 1

Getting a call from Jack Crawford about going out to a murder scene was one thing; having him say he couldn't make it out there with Will was another thing entirely. It meant that he wouldn't be there as a buffer between Will and the rest of the investigators, who could sometimes say insensitive or abrupt things when Will was trying to think. It meant that the scene was remote, and hard to access. And it meant that it was going to be a very, very long day.

"I'm afraid I won't be coming out there with you Will. I need to be able to get back to Bella at a moments' notice, and there's no way into this site other than partially hiking in."

"Sounds great. Nothing like a nice long trek through a swamp in 95 degree weather."

"You can take ATVs part of the way, but then it's walking. You'll need a lot of bug spray, and you'll have to wear waders."

"At least I have those."

"It's more or less a wetland until you reach the location. He did a good job in hiding it."

"How was it found?"

"Some folks from the DEC were doing routine wildlife population checks."

"So the scene was intentionally devised for animal predation."

"I'm pretty sure that was part of the set-up. Will, from the pictures I've seen, this place better than what we have at all the major teaching facilities. There's a greater variety of animals, the damp conditions are perfect for the acceleration of decomposition."

"So they've put together their own body farm."

Will thought the idea staggering. There's only one way someone could have done this, and it was to have received a great deal of education in forensic pathology.

"Given that the set-up was so close to Quantico, it was likely they'd been in training," Will speculated.

"I would have to agree. In fact, they're already starting to call them, whoever they are, 'The Profiler'."

"I find that monstrous, Jack."

Will sat in silence for a moment. If the killer had been studying at Quantico, there was a decent chance that they'd been in one of his classes at some point.

“Have you checked any lists of former students? Any who might have washed out, but still stayed in the area?”

“That’s a pretty big list as it turns out. We’re working on it right now.”

After he had ended the call, Will sat back on his chair, and covered his eyes. Something told him that this was not only going to be dirty, hot, and messy, but that if this killer had been training to be a profiler, it would tax him in ways he didn’t want to consider.

. . . . .

Jack hadn’t exaggerated about the conditions. It had been unusually wet, and unseasonably hot in south central Pennsylvania, where the body farm had been found in a remote corner of the Michaux State Forest, about two hours from both Wolf Trap and Baltimore. The scene was described him as, literally, being in the middle of a swamp, or something like an island in the middle of one. It may have been there for almost two years. No one went out there regularly, as it was too overrun by biting insects, and the only way to get there was to wade through the swamp itself.

The investigators that secured the area manage to canopy it with yards and yards of parachute fabric so it could be worked on with a little cover from the blazing sun, and not be further corrupted by rain. They surmised that the killer waded out there pulling bodies and equipment in a small boat of some kind; and sure enough, on one of the outer banks where the swamp met land, a canoe made from birch bark had been found concealed under heavy brush.

Will was met at the outer gate of the forest; the entire place had been closed, all entrances were being guarded, and helicopters patrolled the area day and night (then with heat sensors). A black SUV took him to where the ATVs could take him to the edge of the swamp; and after that, it was a hot, sticky, sweaty slog with waders to the place where he’d be spending an undetermined amount of

The scene was about fifty yards in at the closest point; ten yards in and the smell hit.

There were respirators waiting for those who got to the land, a small staging area where one could change out of the hot rubber protective waterproof gear, but there was nothing that could be done while actually getting there; masks would be too hard to breathe through, and it was exercise to get through the thigh-deep muck.

No wonder Jack wanted nothing to do with this, Will thought. *First time I’ve ever envied him the excuse of his sick wife to take care of.*

Will stripped out of the waders as fast as he could, and put on a respirator. It was a little bit of a relief, but he still had to put on Tyvek pants; even though they were was lighter in weight, and he could leave his upper body free, it did little to alleviate how overheated he was.

As expected, Price, Katz, and Zeller were there in similar gear; they’d have to practically shout to hear each other with the masks on. Will didn’t waste any time with greetings before getting straight to the point.

“How did they die?”

Beverly Katz filled him in: “It looks like every last one of them had their skulls fractured. Not enough to break the skull open, but enough to kill them instantly. It’s not possible to confirm that visually on the more decayed ones, but the fresher ones, the indents on the skulls are extremely obvious.”

There was something Will couldn’t put his finger on. Inconsistencies in the way the bodies were killed and brought to the swamp island, roughly and without finesse, and the way that they were so meticulously arranged, and in so many different ways. Will figured he would have been able to think his way through this puzzle if it weren’t for the fact that he kept getting distracted by the undeniable truth that this person had clearly been studying to be a profiler, or a forensic investigator, or something that Will felt much too close to disentangle himself.

Katz continued her preliminary guesses: “The area is clearly divided into five zones, which can all be viewed from this center point.”

“Like a wheel of death,” Will said flatly.

“That’s a poetic way of putting it!” Price, was kneeling over a lower area in front of them, said a little too brightly.

Will looked at him with his lips in a flat line, and Price understood he was to back off on the remarks.

Zeller cleared his throat, and pointed to the first area. “There’s four spots that are more-or-less protected with chicken wire cages, but this one isn’t. It looks like it’s been purposely left open.”

“To animal and bird predation,” Will observed. Several of the bodies had their faces upturned, as if to make it easier for carrion birds to peck at their eyes.

“No religious significance?” Katz asked. “Their faces pointed to heaven?”

“No...there’s no spirituality here. It’s all very instrumental. How many in each?”

“About ten per. So about fifty total, more or less,” she added.

“This next one looks to be bodies buried in various depths in the soil...shallow versus deeper graves,” Price pointed out the section he was examining. “This next group is all missing parts...and here’s the next, all submerged in various levels and types of fluids. Some mostly water, others a thicker mud.”

“This last one is like an insect lab,” Katz noted. “One of your areas of expertise.”

It was the insect predation zone that really got to him. There were various bodies, laid in order of where the bug activity would be least to most. It was like a real-world tableau of a chart he’d designed and had illustrated that appeared in his monograph.

He closed his eyes, and stood there for what the others considered to be rather a long while. He was going over scenarios in his head. There was the incongruity between how they were killed, and what happened to them afterwards, but he put that aside for now. As he always did, he visualized himself as the perpetrator; the pendulum in his mind swept away all the investigators and their equipment, and left only the scene before him.

I carefully select the insects based upon what would be most active in this place in each season.

There were five bodies, and the oldest looked to be there over a year; it was summer now, so this started probably early the summer of the year before; there was a much fresher body with much more active insects than the other four.

I need to finish my education. It had been cut short somehow.

I gather the insects described in the monograph, since I didn't get to this part in my courses. I have to teach myself since I was forced out too early to learn much. If they'd have let me stay, none of these people would have had to die.

If this former student held the Academy responsible, going after whoever dismissed them might be part of their endgame. Or other types of death arrays; after all, now that this "lab" had been discovered, perhaps the subject would go on to other parts of forensic or profiler training they felt it necessary to learn.

Seeing it brought to writhing life was too much. The idea that someone would want to enact it in the real world, and that they'd gotten the instructions from him was the limit.

Will saw not just through the eyes of whoever had done this, as he commonly did, but saw himself as the perpetrator, as if his life's course had suddenly altered, but uncomfortably only slightly; that if things had been different, such an obsession could have led him to do this, rather than actually teach about it.

He jerked back into reality, so much so, that his phone, which had been sitting in his pocket, flew out and landed right in the middle of spring's insect experiment. The everyday mundane nature of something like wrecking your phone brought him back to himself a little; and even if it were salvageable, he wouldn't want it back now.

"Shit," he said aloud.

"What happened?" Price asked as he stood up.

The sudden reminder that he wasn't alone brought him back more, but not before he was startled into tripping over a log, and landing inelegantly on one knee, which smacked a rock quite hard; not hard enough to break anything, but the pain sharpened his senses enough to know the impact had splashed his shirt with...something he would rather not think too much about.

Zeller helped him up, but by then, his mind was three steps ahead of his feet, and he was rushing back to the staging area, sweating, covered in an unholy muck, and not thinking

particularly clearly.

The others knew it was best to let him go, and radioed ahead to the crew on the other side of the swamp to be ready to get him to his car, if he was in any shape to drive.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Will's experience at the crime scene drives him to the only safe place he can think of - Hannibal's home.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

There was a singular task that settled in Will's mind, blocking out all other conscious thought:

Hannibal. I have to get to Hannibal's.

The trudge through the swamp was worse on the way out, the muck weighing him down more the closer he came to the staging area. A thick, twisted crop of roots and branches rose up in a tangle near the shallow shore. He should have seen it, had his eyes been working properly; it spiraled out of the slime, a loop of branch visible just over the water's edge.

Will's boot hooked under the rotten wood and he lurched forward, crying out in surprise. He pitched forward onto the sandy, muddy shore, landing hard on his outstretched arms. The shock of the fall was nothing compared to the shock of what he saw when he rolled onto his back and looked at what had tried to pull him down. He stared mutely at the swamp, at the object that had sent him tumbling into the mud:

Fuck! Another body, a hand!

It was sinking, sliding slowly back into the inky, black mire, even as it beckoned him closer. Curling toward him, skeletal fingers splayed out in a silent, desperate call for help.

There was no time to process anything, only time to act - he flipped over onto his knees, reaching out the short distance to grab the…

"Sir? Sir!"

Someone was hauling him up by the shoulders and Will twisted around, anger flaring at how inept the initial crew had been to miss a body in such shallow water, so close to the shore. Glaring up at the agent, he pulled away, stumbling back toward the swamp, only to be met with the realization that there was nothing there.

Shaking himself, he scrubbed a muddy hand over his face that dislodged his glasses in the process. They hit the ground with wet splash and he reached down with shaking fingers to retrieve them - the latest casualty of his personal items to be claimed by a swamp that clearly wanted to take its secrets down to its murky depths.

Nothing. There's nothing there.

He slipped his glasses on, despite the grime, scanning the water and finding only twisting branches, bobbing slightly in the placid water.

"Sir?"

Will looked back, the same agent still there, still hovering irritatingly close to him. A growl of frustration sent him on his way, but not without a scowl and muttered insult. He pulled his glasses off, stuffing them in the soiled pocket of his shirt, and stripped out of the muddied waders. They were tossed, along with his non-personal items, back into the pile to be checked and retagged. He signed out with the agent tracking those incoming and outgoing, and climbed onto the back of the waiting ATV, and thereafter to the SVU for the ride back to his car.

Several more signatures later and he was finally back to his vehicle. Climbing inside, he slammed the door, angry and disoriented. What had started as a series of coherent, if not singular thoughts, had degenerated into nothing more than a harsh buzzing sound that filled his entire head. Every noise, every distraction was too much - forgoing even the air conditioner, despite the horrific heat, he sped off toward Hannibal's home, on instinct alone.

It's bugs. I see them in there, inside my skull.

He had decided, by the time he pulled into the drive and stumbled into the mudroom, that it was the only explanation for the buzzing sound that refused to silence itself. There was even a light breeze from the beating of their wings, dancing across his face, as he stooped down to pull at his boots.

Exhaustion was evident in every part of his body as he struggled to untie them. He whimpered, frustrated, and pulled worriedly at the laces, a frantic little hitch to his breathing when he couldn't get them undone.

He busied himself with the knot, picking at it with trembling fingers, the jerky movement traveling upward along his arms until his whole body was shaking. His aching knee left him unbalanced, and he fell backwards, a thud echoing in the room when he hit the wall. The pain broke through the fog, a little; in his leg, his shoulder, his abraded palms, but he couldn't remember why he hurt.

What had started out as partial dissociation at the crime scene had tumbled into such an internal state that he failed to see the dark shadow pass over his face while he tugged anxiously at boots.

"Will? Will!"

Hannibal had heard him come in, uncoordinated, and struggling with his boots, as he was. He observed that Will was not looking up at the sound of his voice; he worried that he was so deeply into his own head, that to startle him too much would be to cause further distress.

He had been prepared, though; when Will had left the crime scene without checking in with Jack, Crawford had called Hannibal and warned him that Will had seemed “disconnected,” in the words of the other investigators at the scene. He had been furious that the last agent who had seen him leave hadn’t thrown himself in front of Will’s vehicle, or done whatever it took, to prevent him from leaving on his own in such a state. When Hannibal heard the commotion in the back of the house at the mudroom, he hadn’t been surprised it was Will, only that he had gotten there so fast.

So, instead of trying to get him to respond to voice, there was only the option of a calming touch. Hannibal knelt down in front of Will’s frantic hands, and covered them with one of his own. He immediately stopped trying to rip the laces from their holes, as he had essentially resorted to. Hannibal brought a scalpel from behind his back – he had been sharpening a pencil with it when he heard the car pull in - and sliced through the grime-covered laces. It was clear that everything Will was wearing would have to be burnt anyway.

Will still hadn’t looked up or said anything, but he had stopped trying to fight his shoes at least. Once they were off, Hannibal guided him to his feet, and he seemed more aware of his surroundings, though he was blinking at the light as if he’d been long in darkness. Gradually his eyes came back to focus, and he relaxed slightly as Hannibal had started taking off his filthy clothes, peeling them off of him in soaked layers.

In anticipation of this, Hannibal had brought with him a rather thick black bag, a type which he used when he needed to contain certain things, and not let any odor escape. One by one, Will’s things were put in it, until he was standing here in his less filthy, but cold and damp boxer shorts clinging to him like a wet paper sack. He had begun shivering, though the night was still warm.

“Will, I need you to come with me. We’re going upstairs to where you will not be so cold, and I can clean you off properly.”

His tone of voice was one of a firm command, rather than a request. Will looked at him, as his features had begun to soften. Though he still wasn’t capable of speech, he was becoming more cognizant of his surroundings. He knew, at least, that he was now safe, and managed to nod in agreement.

Hannibal led him straight to the shower off of his bedroom. He wanted to slowly and carefully bathe Will, but he was still so covered in questionable muck, that he’d have to be rinsed off first.

Steering him toward the shower first, Hannibal grasped him by the hip, carefully tugging his boxers from his still shivering frame. The taps were turned on, warm but not overly hot, and Will soon found himself under the rhythmic drum of water.

It was largely a matter of instinct that Will scrubbed himself clean – an almost obsessive desire, now that Hannibal had rid him of his soiled clothing, to get the last remains of the muck and grime off his body. There was a muddy little trail of water weaving its way down the drain, and Will leaned his shoulder against the cool marble tile, watching it until it ran clear.

Peering out of the glass, he noticed Hannibal had left. The logical part of his brain calculated he had gone to fetch something, but his base emotions, the primal instinctual mind, said otherwise. Something was wrong. The buzzing, while it hadn't completely vanished, was suddenly back with a vengeance. He turned his face up toward the showerhead, stumbling backwards in alarm, a startled yelp spilling from his lips. Bugs, pouring from the spout, skittering down the marble enclosure, filling the drain, pooling up the sides of the glass –

"…Will!"

Hannibal hauled him from the shower, shutting off the water and wrapping him in a towel – a coordinated motion so swift Will barely had time to process his whereabouts as he was pulled into a grounding embrace.

Will looked over Hannibal's shoulder, back at the shower, to see if the bugs were gone. He wanted to tell him what had happened, but it came out as a deep groan instead. Thoughts were returning to him sluggishly, but he felt slightly more himself with Hannibal's grounding presence. He turned back, seeing the bath full of steaming water, vaguely wondering when it had been filled.

Even though he intended for Will to be bathed, Hannibal dried him briskly, albeit quickly, if for no other reason than to provide more sensation – to keep him in his body, rather than in his mind.

He smiled gently, and led him to the stone bench near the deep tub, urging him to sit while he quickly gathered the last of his items. Will smiled back, a little, another tiny piece of himself clicking slowly back in place.

"You're…going to give me a bath?"

"Yes. The shower was for the purpose of getting you mostly clean. However, I need to be sure nothing was missed. Think of it as a two-step decontamination process, although I think much more pleasurable."

"What happened to my clothes?"

"They will have to be burnt, Will. I will see to it. They were quite contaminated, as I am sure your car is as well. Jack called me to tell me you were missing, and assumed to be coming here. I am certain they will take your car away and clean it for you. It's the least they could do, after the field agent allowed you to leave in such a state. Jack was quite displeased. And so am I."

Hannibal set down the things he was planning on utilizing during the bath, extravagant and beautifully scented shampoo and other skin treatments. He went over to Will, and placed a broad, warm hand on his shoulder. Will tried to look up at him, but his gaze faltered.

"You could have been killed. Do you even remember driving here?"

"No," Will admitted as he continued to stare at the floor. "I wasn't myself." His voice began to shake a little. "I'm sick of having other people have to be responsible for me. I was just

trying to take back a little control over the situation. But you're right. My mind told me to go to you, but I don't remember much after that."

"I am pleased of that at least, that you had such a useful instinct, and chose to obey it, even if it was a risk to take. Now. You must allow me to take care of you."

He steadied Will as he rose, and his steps became more confident as he walked the short distance to the large, luxurious, marble bathtub. As his mind focused, in the more familiar and calming environment, Will realized this was exactly what he needed. The buzzing that had assaulted him so painfully just moments before now seemed like the remnant of a nightmare from which he had freshly woken; if he concentrated hard enough, he could bring it back to the forefront of his consciousness. He wanted to tell Hannibal about it, but he also didn't want to vocalize it either. It could wait. As long as it didn't return.

He held onto Will's arm as he put one leg in, then the next. The temperature was perfect; as hot as could be, without being scalding. Hannibal knew it was optimal for getting him to focus on the sensations in his body, rather than the images in his mind. As Will began to sink down, the scented oils that had been added to the water began to rise up and swirl around him. A calming mixture of essences of lavender and lemon, familiar and grounding.

"It feels perfect, Hannibal, thank you." Will took a deep breath and closed his eyes. Hannibal said nothing, but put a comforting hand on the back of his head while he rounded the side of the tub.

He suspected Will had suffered no major injuries of any kind, but his curiosity and his concern required he check anyway. Nudging him forward he rubbed a hand down the curve of Will's back, around his sides and over ribs. His shoulder, while often sore, was guarded and Hannibal mused he must have fallen at some point, given the dark crescent of a bruise forming on his knee and his scratched palms he noted downstairs.

Eyes still closed, Will smiled slightly, trying to decide if Hannibal was checking for missed dirt or broken bones. He decided it was both as Hannibal hooked one hand under his shoulder, the other atop it, long fingers curled over the joint. Rotating it slowly elicited no response from the other man and Hannibal concluded, as he previously assumed, that there was no injury, just simple soreness from falling on his outstretched arms.

Satisfied, he guided him backward, and Will let his head fall into Hannibal's hands.

"Perfect, Will, just like that," Hannibal whispered, wanting to encourage him to relax – to focus on anything other than the thoughts he could tell were lurking just on the periphery his mind.

His curls, still slightly damp from the shower, were pushed from his forehead before Hannibal stood to gather the items he had brought with him. Will cracked an eye open as Hannibal passed, hand darting out of the water and grabbing his wrist.

"Are you coming in the bath with me?" Will asked quietly, a minute smile on his lips as he looked up.

Hannibal allowed himself a small, quiet laugh. Will was evidently coming back to himself.

“I do not think that there is enough room for that, Will. But I think I will be able to do an efficient job from outside of it.”

“An efficient job of what?”

In response, Hannibal placed a wooden basin under the head of the tub, where Will’s neck rested. Still standing, he took a small porcelain pitcher and dipped it into the water. He placed his hand on Will’s forehead, tipping it back, and poured the water over his head. Even though Will’s body was immersed in the same temperature, he sighed and relaxed as Hannibal dampened his hair.

Then, he stood, and began removing his own clothing. Quickly, but carefully, Hannibal divested himself of every piece, and knelt on a folded towel at the side of the tub. Will couldn’t see everything he was doing, but watching Hannibal undress was always an extraordinarily beautiful sight.

Despite his exhaustion, he felt a slight twinge of arousal begin to build.

Hannibal poured a small amount of a thick cream cleanser into his palm. He pressed his hands together, bringing out the scent of it, almost as if he was crushing herbs; it had an undertone of rosemary, and something floral or citrus Will couldn’t quite place.

As gently as possible, Hannibal began working it into Will’s hair, and massaging his scalp. Will shivered deeply as he felt Hannibal’s nails just lightly pass over his skin, as he worked in circles. Beyond just washing Will’s hair, he was relaxing him by massaging all the tension out.

By the time he began to rinse Will’s hair, he was nearly in a trance. Not sleepy, but focused on the rigid waves of stress leaving his body. Lightly, Hannibal pressed a towel to Will’s hair to dry it somewhat. Then, fingers firm against the tendons in Will’s neck, he began washing him, starting there, and working his way down to Will’s chest. There he took a soft sponge, and, inch by inch, explored every patch of skin. Over to his arms, Hannibal worked his way down to each hand, taking a small brush to his fingernails.

In one part of his mind, Will thought that should tickle, or be otherwise uncomfortable, but it wasn’t. Was it the skill or his own receptive state that permitted him to receive without retracting? He could only watch, through half-lidded eyes. It was almost as if he was seeing someone else being washed. In any case, Hannibal went back to his abdomen, sponging there. He pressed the flat of his hands into Will’s ribcage, feeling the expansion and contraction, and how regular it had become.

Will’s head dropped to his shoulder, too comfortable to hold it up any longer. The pressure from Hannibal’s hands was grounding – even as his mind wandered, it settled only on sensation and feeling.

“Are you sure you won’t get in?” Will mumbled, voice thick from relaxation. Eyes still partially open, they finally slid shut, but not before catching Hannibal’s easy smile.

Hannibal didn’t respond but saw the playful quirk of Will’s lip as he slid the sponge down his stomach, and moved to the base of the tub. Kneeling down again, he plunged his hands into the water, still hot, and rubbed the sponge over Will’s feet. Working his way over his ankle and up the muscles of his lower leg, he gently washed his knee and the dark bruising that had begun to set in.

Will was not entirely sure he’d ever been so relaxed before, and he found himself having difficulty figuring out where his body ended and the water began – the feeling of floating, far beyond simply resting in the hot water, had overtaken his mind.

No former images remained; not the insects that had tormented him, nor even the remembrance of the trudge through the swamp. The only visuals passing through Will's thoughts were that of Hannibal – his hands, how he must look knelt down at the side of the tub, the look of concentration on his face.

Hannibal eventually switched to the other leg, repeating the thoughtful movements, until he finally came to Will’s thighs. There was no resistance when he pressed them apart, the sponge abandoned momentarily, while he opened them wide.

A small sigh escaped Will’s parted lips. Hannibal worked his hand up, from knee to the soft crease of his inner thigh, and back again. Over and over he repeated the movement with slow, unhurried strokes, until Will was shivering slightly at the sensation.

Hannibal moved up Will’s thigh, circling and massaging just as much as cleaning. It was a delicate balance, trying to both relax and arouse him at the same time; a method of sensory dissonance that would serve to bring Will back into his body and away from his thoughts even more.

Pressing between the juncture of his legs, Hannibal studied Will’s expression as he tilted his head back and closed his eyes. His lips were open, and his breathing deep and regular. Brows knit with tension began to relax by degrees as Hannibal touched him more firmly.

Fingers moved skillfully over the sensitive flesh of Will’s inner thighs. Although there wasn’t a great deal of room to maneuver in the bathtub, he opened his legs involuntarily at Hannibal’s familiar touch. Hannibal now could go further, and began to caress his perineum. Will’s cock instantly responded to the firm but gentle touching, and he arched his back as the caresses strayed to lightly stroke his entrance.

Will’s face had relaxed completely now, concentrating on the small amount of stimulation he was receiving. Gradually, Hannibal moved his hand, feather-light, over Will’s half hard length; he lingered there for a moment, making sure to bring him fully erect by degrees. This was just the beginning of the more direct sexual component of the evening's activities. Just a small taste of things to come to get Will to a state of desire and longing, which would focus Will's mind completely in the present, allowing him to later process what had happened before. Hannibal knew from experience that Will had to be totally led out of the dark places in his mind, if he was to go back to examine them objectively. And total immersion in erotic sensation, to be made to need it desperately, was the most effective method that Hannibal had found.

Finally, he moved his hand back up to Will's abdomen, where he rested the flat of his palm against it. His breathing, which had quickened, began to regulate. Strong hands moved over his chest, stroking hardened nipples as they massaged up to Will's neck. Hannibal pressed into the tendons, soothing them with firm circular motions, up to the muscles in his jaw.

Finally Will opened his eyes, and looked at him with a clarity of expression that signified he was fully back to himself.

"How are you feeling now, Will?" Hannibal asked softly.

Chapter End Notes

We wrote the bathing scene in this chapter well before season 3 came out, FYI. Rather prescient!

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

The bath has the needed effect on Will.

Hannibal watched as Will relaxed back, a little slump to his shoulders in place of their previous tension.

“Better, Hannibal, much better than before.”

He smiled affectionately and turned his head, kissing Hannibal’s palm. The expression of warmth was returned, and Hannibal stayed kneeling near the tub, as Will seemed to gather his thoughts.

“I don’t…,” he started, having trouble voicing his need. His desire to be independent, to be viewed as anything other than an unstable oddity in Jack’s arsenal, made it difficult to ask for help.

He started again, averting his eyes, suddenly finding the dark bruise on his knee entirely worthy of his attention.

“Can I stay here for a while? With the case and all…” He trailed off, scowling down at himself.

“Will?” Long fingers hooked under Will’s jaw, lifting his face, and before he could focus his eyes, an insistent tongue was pressing gently into his mouth.

The scowl and his upturned lip disappeared instantly – he brought his hand up to touch the side of Hannibal’s face, kissing him deeply.

Moments ticked, Will suspended in warmth, before the other man pulled back and stood.

“Not another word of it, Will. My home is always open to you.” Hannibal smiled fondly and then a hand was offered, Will allowing himself to be helped to his feet. He stood for a bit, on unsteady legs, overcome physically by the heat of the bath and the physical relaxation he succumbed to.

Stepping out, Hannibal retrieved a large towel and rubbed it slowly over Will’s skin, gliding over his shoulders, his back, down his sides. The damp thighs looked too inviting to ignore, and so he stooped down, pressing the soft fabric between Will’s legs and rubbing gently.

Hannibal felt Will’s hand on his shoulders. He smiled; that he felt like he had to steady himself was a good sign. And, in fact, he had the best vantage point to see that Will was

getting more aroused, even more than he had been in the bath. He encouraged it, starting to press gentle kisses to the water-warmed skin, and Will responded with a tighter grip.

There he lingered, for a few moments, savoring the feel of Will's thighs beneath his lips, but avoiding brushing against the twitching cock just in front of him. There would be time enough to savor that, and he wanted to pull Will's desire into the forefront of his mind as much as possible, to make him want, to bring him into his body, and away from his less inviting thoughts.

He stopped, and stood up slowly, discarding the towel, and running a hand over the smooth expanses of skin that so welcomed his touch.

Will looked him in the eyes, open and vulnerable, for just a moment; then he reached around to the back of his neck, to bring Hannibal in for a long kiss. It was evident he was now in the proper mindset.

Hannibal broke it at length, and allowed himself to be steered into the adjoining bedroom.

"You always do this to me," Will sighed into his mouth when they were back pressed together, the day forgotten and the night ahead all that mattered. He caressed the strong line of Hannibal's jaw, and placed tentative kisses upon it.

"And what is it that I do?" Hannibal asked with the tiniest hint of mischief in his voice, almost as if he didn't know the answer.

Will didn't bother to respond. It wasn't a real question, anyway. Instead, he caressed the small of Hannibal's back, hands gliding over the firm ass that it gave way to, and finally let himself go. He placed one of Hannibal's hands on his now aching cock, and melted into him when he was rewarded with long strokes full of intent. He arched his back, just far enough away, so he could look down and watch what was so skillfully being done to him.

He saw a thumb, gliding with every third or fourth stroke over the swollen head, shining with precum; saw the touches grow ever firmer; watched almost as if it was not his own body, as his hips thrust into the large hand. If he hadn't had a hand wrapped around Hannibal's back, his legs, now shaking, would surely have failed to hold him up.

"God," Will breathed, voice trembling slightly, "you're hands are amazing." He worried at his own lip, a low hiss giving way to a deep groan as Hannibal's thumb passed over his dampened skin. The pressure was light, at first, gradually building as fingers tightened around him again. He pressed harder, sliding up from the underside of Will's length until he reached his slit – it was there that his grip intensified, the motion repeated in smooth strokes until more fluid gathered, sliding in thick beads down his aching cock.

Hips moving of their own accord, he thrust a few more times into the warm pressure of Hannibal's fist before feeling himself being moved. Led toward the bed, he stretched out on his back, trailing a hand over his chest before taking Hannibal by the wrist and pulling him down.

He was met with a calming smile then lips closed over his, opening him, a skillful tongue teasing inside. His small sighs and whimpers were swallowed by Hannibal's warm mouth until he was pulling back, breathless, and deliciously light headed.

"You're still very tense, Will. Please, turn over. I believe a thorough massage is called for."

"Won't that make me fall asleep, Hannibal? You're too good at it, and I don't want to end this…"

Hannibal looked at him, a smile playing at the corner of his mouth.

"I do not wish to end our evening so soon either. Release of tension can be invigorating, as well as relaxing."

Will considered this for a brief second, and did as he was instructed, intrigued.

Immediately, strong, broad hands were pressing into the muscles of his neck and shoulders. Hannibal had been right, of course; he was wound up like a coiled spring. And he was right about it not making him tired, too; in fact, he found himself more fully conscious, more aware of his body, as Hannibal worked his way down to Will's ribcage. He found he could expand his lungs more after the intercostal muscles were loosened, and oxygen flowed more freely to his brain after he was able to take deeper breaths than he had been all day.

Strong hands on his lower back made him aware of how achy it was, how he tended to hold his stress there as well as his neck. With the pain departing, he became more aware of his core muscles, and also more aware of how his cock felt heavy as it pressed into the mattress, with Hannibal pushing on his back. He suddenly became very interested in having it stroked; needed it, in fact. Wanted those hands to find their way to the front of his body…

Hannibal moved his hands again. This time, he was working at the muscles of Will's ass, skin smooth and hot beneath his deft fingers. Will moaned; he involuntarily arched into the touch, but Hannibal forced him back down. This was the deepest massage he'd done yet, kneading the flesh and making Will inflamed with the need to be caressed there more intimately. He envisioned what had been done to him countless times before, and what would be done to him later; Hannibal spreading him open, his long graceful fingers thrusting inside, stretching him to take his thick cock.

Knowing that this was likely going through Will's mind, judging by the sounds he was making and how he was moving, Hannibal smiled wickedly, and opened Will's thighs, to more easily massage them as well. He made his way down them, over the backs of his knees, to his calves, and finally massaged his sore and painful feet.

Finally stopping, Hannibal reached up to Will's hips, and turned him back over. His cock was leaking and harder than it had been before.

Will reached out and pulled Hannibal back on top of him; he was clear-headed now, completely awake, and fixed on the goal of getting what he wanted.

Anticipation and an easy, unhurried desire thrummed through his limbs. He reached between their bodies, bringing their cocks together, wrapping long fingers around them. Hannibal covered Will’s smaller hand with his own, then leant down, lips closing over the pale expanse of the other man’s neck.

He let his head fall back even farther, resting against the pillows, abandoning himself to the intensity of touch and sensation. Shivering, gasping, Will held tightly to Hannibal, whole body weak with pleasure as they shifted together.

Hannibal had been placing his knee between Will’s, spreading his legs apart so gradually, that Will had scarcely noticed it while it was happening. Now, as Hannibal moved his hand away, before delivering one last, long, firm stroke that made Will whimper loudly, he placed it lightly on a quivering thigh.

He began to massage, pressing into the muscle with his thumb and broad, warm palm; a practice of relaxing Will, the beginning of which he knew signaled that he was being made ready. He gave in to it, shifting back, and continuing to stroke himself languidly.

The hand traveled upwards, and Hannibal studied Will's face, reading his level of both comfort and arousal. He'd tilted his head back, propped up slightly on an elbow, and was breathing regularly and deeply. His eyes were open but unfocused.

Will's lips parted and his breathing quickened when Hannibal began to run gentle fingers over his perineum and balls. Subtle pressure, applied with extensive knowledge of Will's responses, soon had him rocking into the contact. He stopped stroking himself, wanting to focus on what Hannibal was doing to him.

Hannibal's thumb moved to focus attention on pressing into the sensitive area just above Will's entrance, while fingers now massaged his opening. Will moaned continuously, instinctually moving his hips in time with Hannibal's touch. Ever so incrementally, he began to penetrate Will. His other hand strayed to his own cock, aching at the sounds he was extracting from him, now a symphony of desire.

The pressure came in waves, even after Hannibal so carefully penetrated him. He could feel himself opening to the touch, body responding of its own accord. His arms no longer wanted to hold him up he realized, and he let them go lax. Will’s head hit the pillow and Hannibal watched his eyes close, mouth open in a silent cry of pleasure.

A hand pressed against his knee to keep his thighs spread, holding him open gently. Hannibal worked another finger inside his tight entrance, feeling the heat engulf him as he went.

Will’s hand, which had been stroking himself so slowly only moments ago, lay forgotten at his side. The other strayed across his chest, fingers curled loosely over his neck. The flush that descended across his collarbones was marking his chest, creeping slowly downward as the night continued.

Hannibal watched the deep rise and fall of his ribs and then curled his fingers just so. Will gasped, arching his back at the sensation, his hips snapping forward as he groaned. There was a litany of whispered words, hushed noises, Hannibal soothing him and rubbing hard against

his trembling thigh. Eventually he fell back, panting, and the gentle pressure inside him continued once more.

He felt his hand, now tangled in the sheets, being gently guided back to his leaking cock. Will wrapped his hand around, thumb passing hesitantly over the swollen head. In the same instant Hannibal sought out the same place inside him, pressing in and massaging. He was rewarded with another desperate cry and only then did he calm his strokes, slowly bringing Will back down.

“Hannibal!” His breath was short, calming more slowly this time, but eventually evening into a pleasured sigh.

As slowly as he could, Hannibal relaxed, and then removed, his fingers. Will’s eyes had been closed, head fallen back at that last intensely focused attention to his prostate. As Hannibal withdrew, Will began to focus, and started to watch Hannibal’s face intently; watched as he shifted his hips, the long line of his body centering between Will’s widely spread thighs.

Hannibal studied Will’s face, even as he was being studied; the lips of the man below him were parted, his expression one of wanting. Will understood the depth of his desire, and that only served to intensify it. He felt Will’s ankles resting just at the small of his back, drawing him in. Need reflected need, in the shared darkness of each other’s eyes.

One hand resting off to Will’s side, the other wrapped around his own length, Hannibal placed the thick head of his aching cock at Will’s entrance, opened from all the prior touching, but yet invitingly tight. Slowly, he penetrated Will, just shallowly at first, but it was enough to make Will’s breath begin to come in short gasps; he groaned at the sight of it, and neither looked anywhere except right at each other.

Hand still on his cock, Hannibal guided himself inside of Will, just a little more each time, and then withdrawing fully. Will was still languidly stroking himself, thumb gliding over the slick head each time Hannibal entered him anew. The pace increased so gradually, so naturally, that by the time Hannibal was buried inside of Will to the hilt, the stretch seemed no more than it had been a moment before.

A firmer thrust, and Will met it with a slight motion of his hips. His mouth was open, focusing on his breathing, and Hannibal marveled at how he put all of his concentration into taking what was being done to him.

“Are you relaxed, Will? Have I made you ready enough?”

“Yes, oh god,” Will sighed. “I want everything you can give me. As much and as hard as you can give it.”

Hannibal’s teeth flashed for the briefest of moments, and he managed to bite back his growl before it sounded too inhuman.

At the noise Will focused his eyes with even greater intensity, staring up at Hannibal. The shallow strokes were abandoned in favor of a series of quick thrusts, his body syncing with the movements.

His hand was still around his cock, fingers curled over the hardness – but his attention to himself had ceased. Another thrust, deeper this time, and Will's breath was forced from his lungs in a breathless gasp.

He swore, quietly, as Hannibal's fingers slid through the pre-cum gathering against his abdomen. There was pressure, the heel of his hand pushing in slightly against the soft skin at the base of his cock. The sensation made him lightheaded, a hungry noise falling from his lips.

"More, ah, please…" He bared his teeth, eyes squeezed shut for only a moment as Hannibal plunged back inside. The rhythm was maddening, driving him out of his mind even as it cemented him more completely in his body.

Will reached up, palm against Hannibal's chest. He pleaded. An invitation, a surrender – one that Hannibal seized both with pleasure and responsibility. He bent forward and to his great delight felt Will lift his legs slightly, already anticipating what was required of him.

"Just like that, Will." An arm under slid under him, hand cradling the back of his head. Long fingers wound through his hair and Hannibal slipped the other arm beneath him, tight against the warm, damp skin. Held securely, Hannibal's weight anchored his drifting thoughts. He let himself go, giving up to desire and need.

Skin against skin, Will felt the deep and solid breaths as their chests pressed together. He was enfolded, face buried against the crook of Hannibal's neck. One arm locked between them, the other bent slightly to allow shaking fingers a few small movements against his cock.

Hannibal listened, with rapt attention, to Will's quiet, muffled cries.

So different than what he'd been like when arrived at Hannibal's house earlier that night. It seemed like another life, a dream. Hannibal was constantly amazed how arousal and desire, and the fulfillment of it, could transform Will Graham. Before, he'd been shaking with confusion and fear, lost within his own empathic reactions to an unimaginably horrific crime scene; now he was trembling beneath Hannibal's body, as he continued to drive into him, over and over. Hannibal was his anchor to a reality he could never have conceived of before they'd come together like this.

If it was dependency, it was a shared one. Hannibal drank in Will's responses like it slaked a long-neglected thirst.

Their bodies fit together so perfectly, sliding with sweat-slickened skin, Hannibal pressing kisses from Will's neck, to his jawline, to cover his mouth. Tongues meeting, hot and sweet, as Will's body began to rise to Hannibal's with greater fervor.

He breathed in Will's cries, as he began to cum. He shifted his hips just slightly, penetrating the man beneath him even deeper, feeling his orgasm wrack his body, from the inside out. He moved his lips to Will's neck, sucking a livid mark there, as Will gasped and wailed out a deep sound.

“Beautiful,” Hannibal breathed into his ear, as Will’s ecstasy began to ebb. His, however, had just begun to build with a new intensity. His thrusts came quicker as muscle tension left Will’s body. He continued to hold on to Hannibal’s back however, palm splayed along his spine, as if encouraging him to keep going. Hannibal found this to be a perfect encapsulation of Will’s essence; to want to take more, even after he no longer reasonably could.

This simple placement of Will’s hand drove Hannibal to the edge of his own release, and then beyond. It lasted, longer than time could account for. Will’s knees pressed ever so gently into his sides, as he delivered the final few powerful thrusts, before stilling. The only sounds were the rushing of blood in their ears, and shared, hard breaths.

What little tension that remained in his limbs before, had now drained from Will's body. He lay still, feeling the quiet thundering of Hannibal's heart. His hand, still splayed over sweat-slicked skin, was oddly calming. Slowly, he dragged his fingers over Hannibal's back, across the strong curve of his spine, over the sharp curve of his shoulder blade.

He shivered at the feeling of Hannibal moving. Still fuzzy-headed, still deep in the experience of their shared pleasure, Will shifted slightly in Hannibal's arms, resting his forehead against him. Anticipating some unspoken need, Will's head was tipped back, a warm steadying hand at the back of his neck. He opened his eyes briefly, but they closed again, of their own accord, when Hannibal's lips met his. Teased apart, a warm tongue pressed inside, the kiss gradually deepened until Will sighed against Hannibal's mouth.

Nothing of his former anxiety remained. Whatever dark things that lurked in Will's mind were quiet, if only for a time. Though his thoughts drifted lazily, without definite form, he had the fleeting hope however much time was allotted to him, free from confusion, from panic, from darkness, that he could spend them in Hannibal's arms. He opened his eyes, meeting Hannibal's soft gaze. Something passed, unspoken, between them - Will felt it, heard it in the very depths of his being, and he reached up, pulling him down into a heated embrace.

Gradually, and reluctantly, Hannibal shifted his body to move off of Will’s. His cock had barely softened, and Will groaned loudly as he pulled out, breaking his reverie, but also putting him back into his body.

Hannibal stayed, covering Will’s hip, resting an arm slung over his chest. Both of their hearts slowed, and the quiet of the room made it seem like they were the only occupants of the world at that moment.

Pressing a warm, lingering kiss to Will’s neck, Hannibal finally spoke after several minutes.

“It is my absolute pleasure to bring you back to yourself when you have strayed too far down the dark paths that capture your mind, Will. If you are certain of anything in this world, do not doubt that, not for a moment. But I fear that one day it will be insufficient to bring you back to the world, to me.”

Another kiss, to Will’s jawline; he leaned into it, the reassurance of Hannibal’s words amplified by his touch.

“You must permit me to assist you. I have consulted before, and know…the ways of they who you seek. At least in theory. Many of my former patients were the same, of course, as you well know. If not in method, then in mind. I have never seen you in such as state as you were when you came to my door tonight.”

Will sighed, pressing further into the solid presence of Hannibal’s body. He knew he was right, and he knew it was the only solution. Although Hannibal was well-acquainted with horrors, they tended to be in his life of his own choosing. Bringing in those that he did not summon himself would be different. But there was really no choice in the matter at this point.

“I agree, but. Can we talk about this later?” he asked, stretching out a little, and wrapping himself around the muscular body that brought him such comfort, in so many ways.

Holding him closer, Hannibal pressed a final kiss to Will’s temple. Talking that as a yes, Will closed his eyes; he realized then that his exhaustion was practically incalculable, and began to slip heavily into sleep.

Hannibal decided to let him. Once he was certain he was dead to the world, he extricated himself from Will, and went to get something to gently cleanse his skin. He smoothed his hair back, and knew he’d be asleep quite deeply for a long time.

Departing the room quietly, Hannibal went to fetch his IPad to see what he could find regarding news reports of the crime.

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Hannibal and Jack plan to make investigating the case easier for Will.

“Will? Will, Jack has been calling me all day. Will, you have to wake up.”

Hannibal was loathe to interrupt Will's sleep, but he'd been out for fourteen hours. It was after 12 am when he'd fallen heavily asleep, and it was now after 2 pm. He was now more worried about his blood sugar than his mental state, and Jack was threatening to come over if he wouldn't put Will on the phone.

Will turned over and stretched out, eyes at first opening slowly, then going very wide. He got up and bolted to the bathroom. Hannibal smiled; at least he wasn't totally dehydrated, evidently.

When he finally came out, he sat back down on the bed, head in his hands, rubbing his eyes.

“That can't be right,” he said, looking over at the clock.

“I'm afraid it is.”

“I am absolutely dying for some coffee.”

Hannibal nodded; he had anticipated this, and there was a tray with a carafe on the desk in the bedroom. He poured some for Will, and then sat down next to him as he drank deeply.

“Would it be too much to ask what happened last night?”

“Of course not. In sum, you showed up here after dark. Jack had called to tell me you were likely headed here. You had an episode at a crime scene.”

Will suddenly realized he had a terrific headache, probably brought on by trying to remember. Hannibal handed him some aspirin when he started rubbing at his temple.

“Thanks,” Will said, always vaguely unnerved by Hannibal's ability to not just read him, but predict what he needed. He swallowed them gratefully nevertheless.

“It must have been quite an episode. I can only remember bits and pieces. Flashes really.”

“As I mentioned when I reluctantly woke you, Jack wishes to come here. To talk to you. I informed him that I would only permit it if he came later, for dinner, after you have had some time to get your bearings.”

Will only grunted halfheartedly at this. He supposed there was no stopping him.

“Will, take a very long shower. Dress. I will find you something to wear. Then we must talk, before Jack arrives. With luck, we can put him off until tomorrow, at least about the details of how to proceed.”

Will nodded, staring off into the distance. His memory was creeping back in at the edges, and he didn't like what he saw. Except for the memories of after he arrived at Hannibal's. At those he smiled, and hoped Jack wouldn't pry too much into the Doctor's “treatment regimen.”

He sat for a few moments, after Hannibal departed, trying to gather his thoughts.

Deliberately, he didn’t stray too far from the immediate and most apparent incident – he’d had an episode at the crime scene. And a rather severe one at that. Something there had set him off in such a way that not only had he little recollection of arriving at Hannibal’s house, but the hallucinations had followed him here.

Insects. In his car. In the shower.

“Fuck. I need to shower.” Will mumbled out loud, then shook himself physically, halting the all-too-easy slide into more nightmarish visions.

Scrubbing a hand over his face he padded into the bathroom and turned on the taps, idly waiting for the water to warm. No sign of bugs at least. He debated telling Hannibal. Would it only worry him more? He recalled Hannibal’s words, not frightened, so much as cautious: “…I fear that one day it will be insufficient to bring you back to the world, to me.”

Was he that much on the edge? One foot in the proverbial swamp, the other still on dry land? Will grunted and opened the shower door, a blast of steam billowing out and swirling across his face. He turned the showerhead toward the wall and sank down on the stone bench, letting water wash over him.

He took Hannibal’s suggestion to heart – a long, hot shower. He tried not to think, to feel, or even remember the bulk of the twenty-four hours. Except for Hannibal. His hands. Lips. The press of his body, solid and real, as he curled around him. That, he remembered with utter clarity.

He smiled, in spite of himself, and rinsed the last traces of Hannibal’s expensive and imported soap from his skin. *Wasted on me*, Will thought, amused. Stepping out, he grabbed a towel, seeing something fall to the ground. And then skitter across his foot. He yelped, watching a large beetle burrow under the bathmat beneath his feet.

A careful step forward and Will was sticking a toe under the mat, already assuming there’d be nothing there. He signed in disgust when there was nothing to be found, then took his towel away to be dried, returning to dress in the clothing Hannibal had laid out for him.

Managing to make it downstairs without further incident, he was greeted by another small cup of coffee waiting for him in the kitchen. He drank it down, hoping the caffeine, or at least the ritual itself, would bring him some clarity of mind.

“Will?” Hannibal called to him from the sitting room and he finished the last of his coffee before going to find him. There was a patient smile waiting as Will wandered in and he couldn’t help but reply in kind, a lopsided grin on his face.

“I left some clothes here, huh?” Will grinned again, and looked down at himself, at the clothes that had been set out after his shower.

“More than a few. Perhaps I’ll need a bigger closet if the trend continues,” Hannibal teased gently.

Will snorted, rolling his eyes, but his smiled faded and he grew serious.

“I’m seeing bugs,” Will blurted suddenly, “everywhere.” He swore under his breath. So much for picking the right time.

Hannibal replied with a noncommittal noise, one Will knew he must use with his patients when they said something like this. He offered a reassuring hand as Will slid in next to him.

“No matter, Will. Right now, we’ll concentrate on what you can remember about yesterday. Can you do that for me?”

He nodded, and at the feeling of Hannibal’s hand coming to rest on his knee, Will slipped an arm around his waist. He took a deep breath, one of many, and let his eyes close. There was silence for a time, and then Will started speaking.

“It was so hot, Hannibal. Hideous, really. There’s a canopy formed by the trees almost. Dark in some spots where it’s so thick that no light gets through.”

He sighed and Hannibal watched his lips part, eyes beginning to track slowly beneath closed lids. He had witnessed it before, of course, but rarely up close. Not wanting to disturb whatever process was at play, Hannibal moved his hand slowly, rubbing his thumb in soothing circles over Will’s bruised knee.

“A little farther in and the whole place just opens up. The trees, that is. Sun pouring in. Mosquitos, biting flies everywhere. The whole place just alive with them. Got bit, somehow.” Hannibal watched as Will sluggishly moved his free hand, scratching haphazardly at his leg. When he spoke again, Will’s voice was distant and hushed.

“Have to portage in, almost. Two times. SUV at the gate, then the ATVs. Then the swamp.” He groaned quietly, sounding uncomfortable, and shifted against Hannibal.

“Smell is horrible. Hits you in the face. Putrid, even through the respirator. Skulls were crushed. Doesn’t add up. Dragged them through the swamp in a boat. They found it. Hidden in some brush under a tree.”

Will took in an involuntary shuddering breath, chest rising and falling more quickly.

“Five different areas. Like a fucked up science experiment. One open, started there first. Random arrangement of bodies. Birds, animals got most of them. Another one and there’s

various remains. Buried at different levels. Another one. Submerged. Different fluids. Stages of decay."

Hannibal watched his nightmarish reverie. He was sinking quickly now, eyes tracking furiously, his breath coming in short, painful bursts.

"Last one. Bugs. The Insect Lab." His lips pulled back, teeth bared, and he grimaced violently. Panicked. "A project. It's fascinating. What's to become of them? Laid out like this? Someone at the academy as interested as I was? My area of expertise." Will hissed suddenly, twisting against Hannibal, words falling disjointed and confused as he continued.

"I carefully select the insects based upon what would be most active in this place in each season."

He echoed a thought that played in his head before, at the crime scene. There was a strange inflection to his voice and it fascinated Hannibal, despite the mounting agony he could feel in Will's trembling limbs.

"I didn't want to quit my studies." Hannibal listened, enthralled. *"I have to continue on my own now. Driven out, before my training was complete. So many will die because of that."*

In his mind's eye Will watched a figure kneeling in the swamp, inspecting their work. He saw himself reaching out, so close to touching them, and seeing their face. Hannibal watched Will's hand as it lifted, fingers splayed in a silent gesture of longing.

"So close," he mumbled, pained. His hand closed over their shoulder and the figure spun around. Will yelped when he saw nothing but his own reflection staring back at him.

Hannibal's voice filtered in, sounding insistent, and he opened his eyes.

"Will. Shhhh." He wrapped his hand around Will's wrist, holding him closely as he looked around, confused.

Will grunted, realizing more slowly than he would have liked, that he was safe with Hannibal. On the couch. In the sitting room. He sighed and leaned against him, letting his breathing regulate.

The gentle motion of Hannibal's palm against his knee, the strong fingers rubbing gently over his wrist, and Will slowly returned to himself. When he finally found his voice again he was quiet.

"Did I say anything useful?"

Before replying, Hannibal considered for just a moment what Will had said; in a few brief words, he'd managed to paint a very telling picture. The killer was clearly some kind of student, or former student, of forensic science. That would undoubtedly make the situation simultaneously easier for Will to understand, and much harder to cope with. His tone of voice at describing the last scene – the one most closely related to his subfield – belied a subconscious guilt.

“The utility of your imagery is not up for debate. But what we should discuss is your feelings about it. Beyond the simple horror of being confronted with such a scene, there is the matter of your ability to identify with the killer. It is incredible under normal circumstances. But this…this case will be unimaginably difficult for you.”

Will sniffed in annoyance. Mostly because Hannibal was right.

“I suppose that would explain the bugs. The ones that weren’t there, I mean.”

“Just so. Your subconscious mind has been bringing to the surface the primary element of this case. Primary to you.”

“So what do you suggest?”

“What I suggest is that when Jack comes tonight, we explain this to him. Perhaps not revealing the hallucinations, but making him understand that if this killer were a student of your work, it will not be possible to go forward on your own.”

Will nodded against him. There was no debating this. He couldn’t very well lose his mind every time, and Jack would never let him off of this one, knowing that Will would be the best person to have on the case.

“Looks like I’m caught between a rock and hard place,” Will sighed. Hannibal continued to stroke Will’s hand.

“If there are blows to endure, my presence will soften them. That at least I can do.”

Hannibal allowed Will to rest there, against the beating of his heart, for a few minutes. He felt the tension in his body began to ease up a little, and pressed a quick kiss to his temple.

“I have preparations to make, Will. Perhaps it would quiet your mind if you were to help me prepare the meal?”

“Perhaps a glass of wine would help as well. Or several.”

Smiling, Hannibal reflected that if Will had improved enough to make comments about wanting to drink to chase away his black mood, it was step in the right direction. He shifted, and Will moved to sit up.

The meal they prepared together was simple, at least by Hannibal’s standards. Will was not up to eating much, but of course, Hannibal insisted he had to have something. Jack was unlikely to be in the mood for a complex presentation either. They had much to discuss, but neither Will nor Hannibal wanted to delve into all of the details that evening. A light meal, and a light conversation; only a sketch of a plan. The rest would fill itself in as time went on.

The roast that Hannibal prepared was herb infused, seared and the pan deglazed with a light white wine. As Will was preparing some seasonal squash for an accompanying dish of couscous and grilled summer vegetables, considerations of the meat were in the back of his mind. He’d eaten with Hannibal so many times, he barely thought of where he sourced the protein from any longer; but he still had odd thoughts about serving it to others. Especially

Jack; but, he reasoned, Jack had been at Hannibal's table many times himself. Will had shifted investigations, thrown hints in paths that always led away from Hannibal Lecter when the Chesapeake Ripper was mentioned. And would do so, always.

Thinking of these things did manage to distract him, if only a little. As Hannibal poured him another glass of wine, their eyes met briefly. A hint of a smile played at the corner of Hannibal's mouth as he watched Will's gaze travel to the beautifully prepared meat that he had just taken from the oven.

"Smells delicious," Will said, smiling minutely himself. Hannibal nodded graciously, just as the doorbell rang.

"I'll see him in," Will muttered. "You finish here. It's all right, really."

He went to let Jack in, who, to his credit, was not bursting with immediate questions as to Will's mental state.

"Dr. Lecter assured me that you are fine now, Will, but we have to take steps to prevent something like that from happening again."

"I know," Will said, gesturing for Jack to take a seat at the table. Just then, Hannibal came in with the platter of sliced meat. Will went to get the vegetable dish and to let them talk for a moment. About him. He tried not to sulk about it.

"Hello, Jack. Yes, Will is quite recovered. But of course, you are right, and we will discuss the measures needed to prevent another episode."

"That's why I'm here. Thank you," he said, as Hannibal filled his wineglass. When Will returned, he had utterly failed to plaster on a smile. He debated spinning his heel the minute he walked in. He played through an almost instant list of options for leaving the dining room, each more ridiculous than its predecessor:

I forgot to prepare a side dish. We need more wine. I'm making dessert. I'm not feeling well. Something's on fire. I'm seeing bugs, Jack.

"Jack," Will stuttered, before he could stop himself, "I'm seeing bu—"

Hannibal cut him off abruptly, with an elegant but dismissive wave of his hand. Jack stared at Will, eyes narrowed and jaw working as he puzzled through the possibilities.

"What Will is saying, is that he is seeing to it that he takes the appropriate precautions to keep himself well during this unfolding investigation. As such, he will be staying with me for much of the duration of it."

Will watched him smile - a calm, easy look on his face. Hannibal gently tapped the table with spread fingers - the sound was quiet but it seemed ridiculously loud in Will's head. He watched the gesture, watched Jack's reactions.

Fingers spread. Palm open. Just a simple little movement as Hannibal drummed his fingers on the perfectly-placed-perfectly-ironed tablecloth. The movement speaks volumes, Will

thinks: *nothing to hide here, nothing lurking under the surface of Will's behavior for you to be concerned about, Jack*.

He looked, with a sideways glance, as Jack's awareness was drawn back to Hannibal. Will hid a smile as he stood, grabbing the vegetable dish and plating some for the three of them. Hannibal continued, momentarily satisfied with the distraction.

"As you are well aware, this investigation has the capacity to be quite," he paused momentarily, "trying for Will, given what he has shared with me already. I have taken the liberty of seeing that his home affairs are in order and that his animals are cared for during the duration of the case."

Jack grunted his approval, nodding. While undoubtedly observant, he deferred to Hannibal in matters of Will's mental state; and if Hannibal appeared untroubled by his present behavior, then Jack was as well. And so it played out that way, their conversation descending into a somewhat pleasant jumble of noises as Will picked at his food.

They were discussing the case, he knew, by the meter of their words - the crime scene, the details that had been gathered therein. He was carried along on the rising and falling tones as they talked. Nonsense sounds. A polite laugh from Hannibal, a louder one from Jack. More conversation. Will jumped at the harsher noise, but only Hannibal noticed. Jack was busy wiping his mouth with one of Hannibal's starched napkins. Murmuring. Will looked up from his plate, vaguely wondering how much time had passed.

"…a delicious meal, Hannibal, as usual."

"…of course, my table is always welcome to you."

Will came back to himself a little bit as the conversation stilled. A look between them, and Jack appearing satisfied, even sated. The meal? The conversation? Both, Will decided. He wondered what - no, *who* - they had eaten. But the thought was simply pushed from his mind. It didn't matter.

"I'll…clear the plates," Will mumbled and Hannibal smiled, thanking him; such a gracious host. He gathered them up, returning with after-dinner drinks. Escaping again to the kitchen, he leant against the counter, listening.

Hannibal's voice filtered in: "Jack, I should think, under the circumstances, that it may be best if I were to be involved in this investigation. You agree, no doubt, that this has the capacity to be extremely unsettling for Will, for obvious reasons. I have reservations about his mental state, should I not be there to mitigate some of the," he chose his next word carefully, "unpleasantness. I can help keep his mind grounded."

Will saw in his mind, as Hannibal reached out across the table again, fingers curled toward Jack in a silent gesture: *Best to agree with my proposal. I'll be able to help much more if I'm directly involved, Jack.*

"I can arrange for that of course, Hannibal. I'll have the necessary paper work done up. We'll need him back in the field tomorrow, you know. As early as possible."

“I will personally see that he is well-rested for the morning."

Their voices faded out again, discussing the logistics, and then Will was walking back into the room, right as Jack was standing.

“I’ll need you bright and early, Will. Game face on and ready to go. The good doctor here gave me his word.” Jack flashed a brilliant smile, hand clasped on Will’s shoulder. He clicked his tongue, obviously pleased with the progress of the evening. Will felt the irrational desire to rip it from his mouth. The thought startled him, the vision tumbling in with all the gory detail of a night-time fever dream. But he only nodded, mute, and averted his eyes to stare at Hannibal’s shoes.

“You have my word.” Hannibal smiled, all teeth and sincerity, and then Jack was being led outside. Will stood silently. Waiting.

“You need to sleep tonight,” Hannibal replied as he returned, closing the door behind him. "I suspect tomorrow will not be easy for you. I can give you something, if you wish—"

“I don’t want anything, Hannibal. Well, maybe whiskey."

He laughed quietly, amused. “Just as well. Come. Help me in the kitchen first.” Will nodded and found himself steered away, a warm hand against his hip. They busied themselves for a time with remains of supper - Hannibal placing the leftovers in containers, labeled neatly, while Will idly cleaned the dishes.

A thorough job, Hannibal smiled to himself, pleased that Will didn’t attempt to put his china in the dishwasher. He finished with the leftovers more quickly, and stood back for a moment to watch the other man. He worked methodically, if a little absently. The last dish was eventually put up to dry, but Will plunged his hands back into the water, swirling his fingers through the soap.

“Will.” Hannibal approached slowly and slipped his arms beneath Will’s, taking the stopper from the drain and turning on the tap. The water warmed and he grasped Will’s hands, rinsing them clean. A soft towel followed and then Hannibal was rubbing the cloth over them, slowly, grounding him.

Eventually he stepped away, and Will turned, watching a glass - his glass, he realized, for when he came to stay - being filled.

“Go upstairs after you finish your whiskey.” Hannibal spoke gently, though the matter was clearly not up for debate.

“Are you going to read to me?” A little of himself returned and he grinned up at Hannibal, downing his drink in a single swallow.

“You are intolerable.” But Hannibal smiled - a rare, sincere one, saved just for Will. He kissed him deeply, albeit briefly, the taste of a fine whiskey on his lips. He turned back to the few remaining items in the kitchen. “I’ll be up shortly."

Will retired, and what seemed like only a moment later, he was drifting quietly, nearly asleep, when he felt Hannibal's presence enter the room. He sat up, rubbing his eyes, more tired than he ought to be for sleeping half the day.

"Hannibal?" Will whispered, squinting in the near-darkness. There was no response, but the bed dipped and a moment later there were hands against his skin. He was being turned on his side, Hannibal sliding in behind in a fluid motion. Will felt his arms trapped pleasantly against his body as the other man drew in close. His eyes closed and he settled back, Hannibal's broad chest pressed against him as he slipped into shadows.

Morning dawned too early. As often happened, Hannibal was absent, his side of the bed empty as Will came to consciousness. He showered and dressed quickly, one of the wardrobe doors open with a small section of Will's clothing displayed.

He stumbled downstairs to the smell of breakfast, Hannibal standing over the stove.

"Will," he lifted his head but didn't take his eyes off the pan, "may I serve you breakfast?"

"I'm…I'm not sure. The crime scene and all…and the heat..." Will anxiously ran his hand through his hair.

"No matter," Hannibal turned and plated a portion of the food, immediately sliding the remainder in a container. "I will put it away for you, for later."

Will nodded, thankful. He smiled up at Hannibal as he approached.

"You are to call me today, if anything happens. Jack left you a department phone to use if necessary, until you get another."

"I will."

Hannibal took him by the hand, a large thermos of coffee waiting.

"Thanks," Will said quietly, closing his eyes briefly when Hannibal gripped his shoulder in response.

Will grabbed his things and headed out to his car, taking a moment to compose himself. He opened the thermos, expecting a blast of steam. Instead, he heard the tinny sound of something hitting the metal interior.

Hannibal had made him iced coffee. Will grinned, grateful for it when the oppressive heat would undoubtedly become too much. Until Hannibal could join him in the field, or at the BAU, these small reminders of his presence would have to suffice. He recapped the bottle and sped off toward the crime scene.

. . . . .

Hannibal had an appointment to keep with Jack Crawford. In return for being granted access to the case, he'd agreed to help with some profiling and investigation, albeit not yet in the field. Not in the swamp at any rate.

When he arrived at the BAU, wearing a lighter suit fabric in charcoal grey, fitting the unseasonably early heat of the day, he was greeted, given his temporary credentials, and led to Jack's office by an assistant who seemed more nervous when Hannibal smiled than when he did not.

He shook Jack's hand before taking an offered seat.

"Some of the bodies have begun to be taken back here," Jack explained. "I thought we'd start with the ones that were in the 'Insect Lab' part of the display, since that appears to be the part that the killer took the greatest care with. Maybe we should start there? Or do you have any other ideas?"

"Have you gone through the list of former students? Perhaps that would be a more revelatory place to begin."

Jack nodded and brought Hannibal to the briefing room where the records were being kept, a rather large collection.

Hannibal took off his jacket and began to scan the files.

"How many students begin the program of study and fail to complete it?"

"A fair amount. Less than half but more than a third."

Frowning at the immense number of records that would indicate, Hannibal had a thought.

"Will suggested the killer would be focused on those who had a particular interest in his monograph on insect activity, and that may still live in the area. Could we begin by narrowing by those criteria? Perhaps someone who attempted to enroll in another program of study after leaving the Academy, or perhaps before?"

"You think they would've washed out more than once?"

"They do appear to have a certain degree of tenacity."

Jack spent the next half an hour giving orders to his team of investigators that had begun to assemble. Hannibal looked through some of the files, idly thumbing through the pictures. The majority were men, but not by much. It was the first time that he gave any thoughts to considerations of gender. Although most of the cases of serial killing he knew were perpetrated by men, they were by no means exclusively responsible. He stored the thought away for the time being to let it brew in the back of his mind.

He listened to Jack briefing the others:

"I need someone to track down all missing persons that you can, who wouldn't necessarily be considered missing immediately. We've managed to identify two of the victims so far; both were not reported for months after their disappearances, both known to be involved in prostitution, one male and one female. Killer does not appear to have a sex or gender preference, but does like people who won't be missed right away. I need another group to go through all these files. Unfortunately, they are former students. Find out what they're up to

now, and if they had any other programs of forensic training. We don't think this killer will be very pleased we've interrupted their self-devised course of study. They might not be able to set anything up like this again, but there're sure to continue in some form. Get to it."

When Jack was finished, and everyone had left to perform their assigned tasks, he went back to talk to Hannibal privately.

"I have to talk to you about Will, Dr. Lecter. How much do you think you can help him deal with this case? If it does turn out it's one of his former students, he'll feel responsible."

Hannibal inclined his head and considered this for a moment.

"Will Graham's talents are very much a double edged sword for him. On one hand he is uniquely positioned to capture these killers and provide education about their methods. On the other, dissemination of knowledge about their practices may educate the next one."

"Well," replied Jack, "you are unique in your ability to understand him. I hope that's enough to get him through this."

Hannibal smiled mysteriously.

"Yes Jack. I believe I can."

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Will goes back to Hannibal's after a long day at the crime scene, and finds he is quite hungry.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Back at the crime scene, Will was impressed with the progress that had been made in making it more accessible.

The swamp had been completely dredged and no significant evidence had been found other than the boat. It was therefore possible to have the Army Corps of Engineers come in and install a pontoon bridge so wading through it was no longer the first task to getting to the scene. He was surprised how quickly they'd done it; but then, he supposed with such a prolific killer on the loose, it took priority. This made the need for hot, uncomfortable waders unnecessary.

The bodies still caused the air to be unbreathable, however, so respirators it was. But without the restrictive, stiff clothing, Will found he could think more clearly.

The bodies with the insect predation had been removed first. These were back at the lab, being examined. Now that he was more focused, he decided to look at the section of those who were buried at various depths in loose soil. Once he got the other investigators to give him some space, he found a clean place on the wooden path nearest to these, and sank down to one knee. He closed his eyes.

Will found that the sound of his breathing in the respirator, rather than being a distraction, aided in his imaginative capacities. Surely, he thought, the killer would be hearing the same sound echoing through their ears as they went about their work. There was no way they'd be able to breathe the air any more than he could.

There was a rhythm to it, in fact. Meditative, almost calming, had he not been surrounded by death and decay. It took a few moments, a few more measured breaths, and then he was sinking into a memory – one that wasn't his. He watched a figure moving slowly through the swamp.

It's early morning. The sun is barely breaking through the clouds. Working in the night is not an option; I can't see the progress of the experiments. Midday, this time of year, is too oppressive. I'm forced to come now, before the sun is too high.

Even then, before the heat descends and everything is still, save for the din and clatter of insects, it's overbearing. The respirator is necessary. The smell bothers me. Acrid. Bitter. But a necessary evil for the events put into motion.

But this, a creation by my own hands, this is a thing of beauty.

Will sighed quietly, watching in his mind's eye as the figure spread their arms over a series of bodies, their face irritatingly blank. Their motives, their methods, just as hidden. Distantly, he felt his own breathing quicken. Frustration spread through his limbs, dulling his mind and making him anxious.

He heard the bugs again. A low hum, droning on, like a distant machine thundering closer.

For a time, how long, he didn't know, he drifted in twilight – vague impressions, feelings, a hint of something bitter, but never anything more. Through the haze, he became aware of a growing pressure, an annoying sensation that became impossible ignore. Will realized, slowly, he was being touched. A voice filtered in, insistent.

"Mr. Graham?" Someone gripped his shoulder, shaking him slightly.

Will groaned, nauseous and disoriented. He stood too quickly, shrugging off the contact. The world tipped on its axis, and the hovering agent grabbed him by the arm before he could protest.

"Sir? This area will be closed off soon. If you need to stay, we have to call in for authorization."

He grunted, shaking his head and pulling his arm back.

"Mm. No. I'm done here."

The agent nodded, watching him carefully for a moment as he gathered himself. Will collected his bag and wandered to the checkpoint to be signed out and released. Once inside his car he slumped against his seat, oddly exhausted. There was another feeling however, one more difficult to place.

Will wrapped an arm around himself, suddenly struck with an almost unbearable emptiness. Hunger. It was sharp, twisting, and for a moment he couldn't recall the last time he had eaten. He tried to puzzle through it, but his thoughts were fuzzy, fading too quickly from his memory.

The thought of something from a store made his stomach turn, but he remembered the thermos Hannibal had given him. A few slivers of ice remained and he took a long drink, if for no other reason than to quench his thirst. With shaking hands he recapped the bottle and started the car.

. . . . .

By the time he reached Hannibal's the ache in his stomach had disappeared; in fact, nearly everything had disappeared. He felt numb, detached, albeit in a somewhat pleasant way. He

let himself in through the back door, undoing the laces on his boots and dropping his bag to the floor. Fortunately, this time, the only things on him that were soiled were his shoes.

There was an overwhelming urge to find Hannibal. He wanted nothing more than to see him. Will's thoughts ticked by sluggishly. *Would he be in the kitchen? In bed? Was it too early for bed? What time was it?* He looked back to the door, suddenly unable to remember if were already dark. He stepped out of his boots, leaving them in the back room, and stumbled into the kitchen.

"Will?" Hannibal was there. There was a feeling of pure, uncomplicated joy at seeing him. He dragged his feet. They felt leaden, uresponsive. The very act of moving across the kitchen was too much. But he eventually he did move, sliding his arms around Hannibal's hips and pressing his body as close as he could.

He could feel Hannibal pondering, running through the possibilities of his behavior. There was his name again, being called out, but it was too much to respond. He sighed softly. A hand came up, gently stroking his face, and Will thought he had never felt anything so sublime.

My shirt must be untucked. Will heard his own internal dialogue as one of Hannibal's warm hands came to rest against his side.

"Will, you must tell me what's wrong."

Another sigh, deeper this time from fatigue and confusion, and Will was resting his forehead against the other man's shoulder.

"I'm hungry," he mumbled quietly, lips brushing faintly over Hannibal's dress shirt.

Will felt more than heard a quiet laugh.

"I believe that is something I can help you with. I imagine you had nothing all day? And very little yesterday, as I recall."

Nodding against his shoulder, Will brought his head up, and saw Hannibal smiling at him, all warmth and care; Hannibal's connection to food was a deep and meaningful one. To feed Will was to give him life.

"Come, and sit. I will pour you a glass of wine, and see what is most easily and quickly prepared."

Although the comfort of Hannibal's presence was difficult to leave, Will was finding the lack of food had made him lightheaded. He sat at Hannibal's kitchen table, and found the light, semi-dry wine Hannibal had set before him refreshing if not exactly nourishing.

It was clear to Hannibal that Will needed to eat as soon as possible. In lieu of preparing him something sumptuous, Hannibal found a portion of a roast that he imagined would make an excellent accompaniment to a few cold roasted vegetables. A simple vinaigrette was whisked freshly, as there were some things he would not compromise on.

After he'd gotten these things out, he refilled Will's wine glass, and set before him a dish of figs that he drizzled in orange blossom honey.

Will hesitated to take one, so Hannibal placed a section at his lips. He ate, and seemed immediately clearer, and took another on his own.

"Good," Hannibal said smiling down at him, and placing a hand over his. "I will have something more substantial for you momentarily. I expect these to be gone when I return."

Will felt his appetite returning, alongside his desire to please Hannibal.

A lemon shallot dressing was made, and the meat sliced and placed along the vegetables. Hannibal brought out the laden platter of it all and set it before Will, who had obediently eaten all the honeyed figs.

He stared at it, before asking, "Do you expect me to eat all of that?"

Hannibal tsked. "If not all, then most. You should not skip so many meals, Will. This case has damaged your appetite, and losing weight rapidly is not good for your health. Undoubtedly, your stomach has shrunk down. It would be wise to expand it to full capacity once more. That way, you will feel hunger when your body needs to be fed."

With a look that said, *okay, whatever you say*, Will took a bite of the meat, and another of a piece of green squash. His eyes lit up at the exquisite, delicate flavor of it; the vegetable perfectly enhanced by the dressing, and the meat tender as he could imagine, after sitting to absorb its own juices for the better part of a day.

The look on Will's face pleased Hannibal immensely. He marveled as he witnessed his desire to eat return bit by bit as he consumed each bite with greater relish than the last.

"Slowly, Will. I realize you must be famished, but you will be able to eat more if you consume it more gradually."

Will nodded, and paused to drain his wineglass, only to have Hannibal refill it a third time.

He began again, eating more thoughtfully this time, and watching as Hannibal's eyes never left his face. He wore the oddest half-smile, as if he was enjoying seeing Will eat more than Will was enjoying the food.

“Are you going to eat with me?” He asked quietly, studying Hannibal’s curious smile.

“No, Will, not this evening. This,” he gestured with a little flourish of his hand, “is sustenance enough for me.”

Will regarded him for a moment, unsure of what he meant. Words within words, like a coded little puzzle of language that Hannibal seemed only too amused to deliver. Will responded as often did, with a faint smile. It delighted Hannibal when the expression reached his eyes and Will ducked his head, away from the playful scrutiny, laughing softly.

“It’s so good, thank you.”

Hannibal hummed his appreciation as Will turned his attention back to the plate. Continuing to eat more slowly, he fell into a meditative rhythm – the quiet strike of a knife against the china, the slide of the wine glass across the table, the soft sigh as he took another drink.

And so, after a moment of watching him, Hannibal came to sit – their chairs nearly touching, and, by way of it, their thighs pressed against each other in comfortable warmth.

There were other places on Will that radiated warmth, Hannibal noticed. The food, the wine, the safety of being out of the field had brought a mottled little flush to Will's neck. There was no way to resist the urge to touch - to be denied the opportunity would be madness. So he indulged himself, long fingers dancing over heat of the other man's skin, a thumb raking very gently over his throat as he swallowed.

"Please," Hannibal whispered, as lips followed the trail of fingers, hovering close over Will's ear, "you must eat some more."

Pausing for just a moment after this briefest, but most meaningful of touches, Will breathed deeply. He turned to look at Hannibal, to watch him even as he watched. His eyes had grown quite dark, the dilation of his pupils giving the effect of his eyes being entirely black. Will also noticed his breathing was deep and regular; it got that way when he was trying to commit something to memory so fully that he would be able to replay the experience as if it were a piece of film.

Hannibal leaned in again to press his mouth to Will's ear, and again, said "Please."

Will complied, going more slowly this time. A bite, a drink, another bite. Hannibal's breath hot at his neck. Then his hand, first at Will's knee, then moving upwards. Gently squeezing his thigh; then onwards to his belly, getting so full as he continued to eat.

Touching him there, Hannibal could not hold back a quiet moan.

Sliding gently over Will's stomach, the hand's touches were light but deliberate. Exploratory. Will knew that he had likely grown a bit thinner over the last few difficult days, but that was beginning to change. Even through Hannibal's softly gliding hands, he could tell there was a difference in the way he felt.

He stopped consuming, just long enough to look down, and notice that Hannibal's trousers had grown rather tight. His kisses were becoming more insistent.

"I...don't think I can eat anymore."

Straightening up, but still touching Will's abdomen, Hannibal looked at him warmly, head tilted just to the side. He reached out, and picked out a small morsel with his fingers, just a tiny bite of the meat. The juice of it quickly coated his fingers, and reflected in the dimming light of the room.

"I think you can. Just a little more."

Still caressing with the other hand, Hannibal placed the bite of food at Will's lips, who complied, his eyes closing at the taste and the feel of Hannibal's fingers at his lips. He licked them clean, and heard the intake of breath that Hannibal gave.

They went on this way for several minutes, Hannibal feeding him ever more slowly, hand at Will's belly; soft noises of pleasure heard, and the sucking of fingers.

The lightheadedness that first brought him to Hannibal's table hadn't disappeared; if anything, it intensified, but pleasantly so and in another form entirely. Whereas before there had been the absence of fulfillment, now it was the beginning of sweet excess.

"I feel very full, Hannibal." Will said quietly, letting his head fall against the other man's shoulder.

"It is almost gone, Will. Only a small bite remains. Surely," Hannibal whispered, "you could take just one more."

Will moaned softly, lips parting at the memory and feeling of being fed, long past the point of fullness. Slowly, Hannibal slid the last of the food into his mouth, Will's tongue poking out to suck languidly at his fingers. The act seemed to trigger something in Hannibal. No sooner had Will swallowed than his head was being tipped to the side and Hannibal's mouth, gentle but insistent, was stealing away the last of his breath.

A quiet gasp and then Will was sliding his trembling hand over Hannibal's thigh, brushing lightly against the growing arousal he felt pulsing against his palm. Something uncoiled inside him when he felt the heat at his fingers, his own cock throbbing in sympathy.

Will licked his lips, before leaning forward and capturing Hannibal's between his teeth. Biting softly he drew in for another kiss.

"Please? Could we go upstairs? I want to be near you."

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for keeping up with this! Updating once per week (hopefully on Saturdays).

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

After his long and sensual meal, Hannibal takes Will to bed.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Hannibal smiled, warmly and broadly.

"Of course," he said. "Come."

Will didn't hesitate to take Hannibal's offered hand, rising on tired and unsteady feet. An arm around his waist, and a kiss pressed lightly to his temple. Hannibal remained just a step behind him while leading him slowly up the stairs. Fatigue and fullness were beginning to affect Will; he felt heavier than he had in weeks. Not unpleasantly so; but he was unused to the sense of satisfaction and it made him dizzy.

Hannibal's bedroom was a welcome sight. Its comfort and opulence drew the last of the days' stress from his body and mind.

He walked to the bed, and ran his hands over the cool but lush duvet. He touched his own shirt; suddenly the fabric of his clothes felt quite out of place, so he decided they would have to go.

Hannibal stood back, only a few feet, but enough to allow Will proper space to undress. He watched intently as Will moved to unbutton his shirt. His eyes were nearly closed, his breathing slow and regular. A deliberate reveal of his skin.

Once his shirt was fully opened and untucked, Will began to run his hands over his chest, and down to his taught belly. He groaned when he felt it, so different from what it had felt like just an hour before. An unfamiliar sensation, but wonderfully new and entirely welcome.

Hannibal's lips were parted, watching him begin to explore his changed body. He struggled to resist the temptation to touch. He wanted to see more, and knew he must allow Will to go at his own pace.

He continued on, slowly, an odd mix of utilitarian efficiency and playfulness to his undressing - something uniquely Will. Hannibal found it impossibly endearing and he smiled. A tentative hand sliding up and over his ribs, the deep breath that followed, and then Will was shrugging out of his shirt, laying it across the back of a chair.

Socks were almost an afterthought, discarded, before he turned to the remaining garments. Will raised his head, suddenly aware of Hannibal's presence in the room. He smiled and grasped his belt, pulling it slowly through the buckle.

Pants followed, tugged down over his hips and the beginnings of arousal. Already half hard, his cock lay flushed against his pale thighs. Standing suddenly felt like too much effort. And so Will sat on the edge of the bed, facing Hannibal, eyelids heavy with a warm and curious fatigue.

After a time even sitting seemed too much. He pushed himself completely back, falling onto the plush duvet. The contrast between warm skin and cool fabric was too much - Will stretched against the luxurious feeling and the slide of silk against flesh.

Hannibal watched with eager eyes, saw Will as he gently scratched his nails across his chest and sides, an alluring redness rising up in their wake. A soft touch against a sensitive nipple and Will was arching his back, gasping.

The next motion was not a deliberate tease; instead, it was an invitation to share in his pleasure – Will let his thighs fall open, parting slowly before Hannibal's gaze. He avoided touching his cock, ignored it in fact. The act was not one of denial or lack of desire; rather, there were so many other sensitive places on his body he rarely explored.

He ran hands over his stomach. It seemed so strange it was to be this full, this sated - but wholly pleasurable in its simplicity. Will sighed out Hannibal's name as he touched himself, hip bones disappearing under the soft swell of his belly.

Watching Will touch himself as he was doing was a beautiful torture for Hannibal. He wanted to keep watching, to let the event unfold perfectly, undisturbed; yet he also needed to touch, to feel the soft-yet-taught skin as Will's hands traced it.

He decided to watch, for a while longer, as he slowly began to remove his own clothing. He had only been wearing a shirt, sleeves rolled up to the elbows, as he had been feeding Will; this he removed, along with trousers and shoes. Will took no notice, nor did Hannibal wish him to.

When he was down to boxer briefs, he sat quietly and lightly on the bed. The parted thighs, flushed and warm, were ultimately irresistible. A light touch, and Will opened his eyes.

"Don't stop, Will. I want to watch you a while more. You are beautiful like this."

Will smiled softly, pleased at Hannibal's praise. He ran fingers up from his belly, over his ribcage, to stroke a hardening nipple. He sighed, as did Hannibal, to see the pink blush spread up to his collar bones.

Hannibal traced the heated places of Will's thighs. Will's cock, which had been resting half-hard against his abdomen, responded. In no time, his length was throbbing, aching at Hannibal's touch.

"Please...please touch me...," he breathed.

Now it was Hannibal's turn to smile.

He bypassed Will's cock, to at long last place hungry, searching fingers at the swollen belly that so fascinated and drew him in.

Arousal coursed through Will's veins, every touch bringing him pleasure, even without Hannibal’s hand wrapped around his cock. He arched up into the contact, gasping when he felt warm fingers pressing gently into his skin.

“I feel very warm.”

There was no response, but Will felt the smile in Hannibal’s contact. Fingers traced over his swollen flesh - up across his ribs, his chest, down again over his sides and the soft curve of his stomach.

It was repeated for a time, until Will was dizzy with longing. He stretched, moving slowly beneath Hannibal’s curious touch. The movements stilled, and there came a gentle press against his side, Hannibal’s palm pushing in slightly atop the bony crest of his hip. It slid across his skin, only to stop again near the juncture of his upper thigh and abdomen.

Hannibal rubbed his thumb across the soft skin, a bright stain of color springing up in the wake of his touch.

“Beautiful,” he breathed out, marveling at the man beneath him. He hungered for more, as much has Will had hungered to be fed only moments ago. The feast before him, so freely offered, was something he wouldn’t deny himself.

And so he gave into the desire: to feel the life he had taken, put into another, someone so much more deserving. He curled his fingers over Will’s warm skin, the heel of his hand pressing into vulnerable hollow of his thigh. It felt empty, compared to what lay only inches away.

A quick shift in movement, and then Hannibal was pressing his tongue against Will’s side, lips trailing close behind. Will shuddered at the sensation, unable to suppress a startled gasp. Hannibal’s teeth, grazing lightly over the bump of his ribs, and Will was moaning softly, asking for more. It was only too easy to comply, working his way down, slowly, until he hovered over the taut flesh before him.

Will writhed beneath him, gasping quietly at the dizzying sensations, working a trembling hand through Hannibal’s thick hair. There was a final kiss against him, and then Hannibal was moving, a new position for them both offering even more opportunity to touch and explore. A steadying arm found its way under Will’s shoulders, helping him to sit up.

“You fed me so much,” he sighed, so openly sated and grateful, that Hannibal couldn’t contain his pleasure.

Smiling as he slid behind Will, Hannibal pressed a firm, open mouthed kiss to his shoulder. Once settled in, Hannibal ran the tip of his nose against Will's ear.

"I am very happy to hear that you are satisfied. I did feed you rather a lot, but no more than what you needed."

A hand trailed back down Will's ribcage, eliciting another soft moan.

"You are just as you should be; filled with so much more life than you were when you first arrived at my home. Your life is precious to me, Will. It is my greatest pleasure to enhance and preserve it."

"Your *greatest* pleasure?" Will asked, his personality finally reasserting itself after the long day.

Hannibal laughed softly against Will's neck.

"Perhaps there are equal pleasures..."

Hannibal kept his hand near to his abdomen, and moved the other to start lightly stroking Will's cock. Just one or two fingers applied skillfully at first. He wanted to ease him into the sensation, and not overwhelm him.

Will realized quite suddenly how much he ached, as the slow build of desire coursed through him under Hannibal's gentle touch. He leaned back against the broad chest that supported him. At first, his breathing was hitched, irregular. But soon, the pace of it matched Hannibal's, measured and even. He sank deeper into sensation, as the fingers stroking his cock became more focused in those attention. He was finally fully present.

Soon, his hips began to move, just slightly, of their own accord. His hands wound through the sheets. He let his head fall back against Hannibal's shoulder.

"Please...," he whispered. "More."

Kissing his bared neck, Hannibal obliged his request, joining forefinger and thumb. All the way up and down Will's length he ran them, still splaying his other hand over Will's belly. All the disparate touches synched for him, and Will bit his lower lip.

Hannibal stroked faster by a minute amount, aided and eased by the slickness gathered at the head of Will's hardness.

“Ah, god…” Will groaned, still worrying his bottom lip.

A shaking hand found its way from the tangled sheets to clutch at Hannibal’s thigh. His other arm he arched backwards, fingers winding gently through the other man’s hair.

Though his breathing was still even, it had deepened. From their joined position it was easy for Hannibal to feel it, his ribcage working apart in great shuddering gasps. There was a curious but entirely enthralling shiver that seemed to grip Will - body tensing, then releasing, in waves. Each time he relaxed Hannibal heard an increasingly desperate moan fall from his reddened lips.

“Please, Hannibal, I’m so close…” Will trailed off, head falling back against Hannibal’s shoulder again.

“A few more moments, Will,” Hannibal said gently, breath warm over the pulse that hammered so visibly in Will’s throat. “Your arousal is beautiful beyond words. To see it end too quickly would be sinful.”

And with that, Hannibal slid his palm, slick with pre-cum, against Will’s straining cock, pushing it gently back against his swollen belly. He repeatedly the motion, over and over, until the man he held so carefully in his arms was lost in pure sensation.

While it was the case that Hannibal did not want this to end, he knew that it could not continue indefinitely. His movements were slow and deliberate, and he read the cues of Will's body with great concentration.

Will's breathing was growing shallow, transitioning from the lung-expanding gasps it had just been. His back was beginning to arch, pressing his shoulder blades against Hannibal's broad chest. He was attempting, unsuccessfully, to gain more contact. Breaths turned to near-sobs; his legs shook uncontrollably.

Words were impossible for him now; he was beyond the capacity to speak. Hannibal knew that Will would plead if he could, beg even, for release. His body was doing this for him.

Taking one last stretching moment to close his eyes and savor Will's desperation, Hannibal finally wrapped his entire hand around Will's surging cock. A cry spilled from his mouth, and Hannibal savored that just as much. His trembling stopped, and his body went rigid as he began to cum. Hannibal stroked him through it, continuously, and kissed his pounding pulse.

A sharp intake of breath, and Will took his fill of air, as if he'd been holding it underwater. Hannibal massaged Will's belly, warm and slick with semen. All tension drained from his limbs, and he caught his breath slumped against Hannibal's comforting presence.

Time ticked by slowly. Will felt suspended, drifting - at ease for the first time in days. He also felt extremely exhausted. Shifting slightly, he turned just enough to tip his head back, capturing Hannibal’s lips. After a moment he broke the kiss and lay his head against the other man’s shoulder.

“I’ve never felt more…” Will trailed off, searching his mind for the word to describe. “Whole,” he mumbled finally, a smile curving his lips. Hannibal slipped his free arm over Will’s ribs, thumb stroking over his heart as his pulse gradually slowed. No words were necessary.

Though awake, for now, Hannibal knew he wouldn’t be for long. He held Will close until fatigue was making his limbs heavy with impending sleep.

Hannibal sat up, slipping out from behind Will, who stretched out slowly on his back.

“Hurry,” Will whispered, smiling tiredly.

“I won’t be gone but a moment,” Hannibal replied, slipping quickly into the en suite.

He returned with a warm, wet cloth; it would not be possible to bathe Will properly now. He needed to be permitted to drift off to sleep as soon as possible, while he was still in a state of perfect relaxation and connection to his physical being, rather than lost in his own mind. Hannibal had pulled him back from that dark abyss, but it was a fragile state. He wanted Will asleep as soon as possible.

He cleaned him gently, slowly, watching as Will's eyes grew heavy and closed. His body relaxed, and his breathing grew regular. Hannibal smiled at the result. Once Will was as cleaned off as could be managed, he guided his body, laying his head down on fresh pillows, and covering him with the duvet.

Slipping out of the room silently, Hannibal retrieved his iPad and a small glass of whiskey. He was not yet tired, but wished to stay by Will's side, ensuring his slumber. He had some things to research; the latest media reports of the killings, limited as they were. He was searching for patterns, anything that could give insight about the identity of the killer.

Hannibal was not going to allow this case to claim Will from him, to drive him into places he could not follow. It had nearly happened already. He knew he had no other option but to delve into the depths of it beside the one sleeping next to him, who he held so dear.

Chapter End Notes

Updating Saturdays! Thanks for reading!

Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

> Will wakes up and decides to prolong their morning together before returning to deal with the case.

Will woke slowly, neither groggy nor disoriented, as were his usual companions after a night's sleep. Instead, he came to consciousness feeling rested and calm.

The memory of the previous night drifted in as he lay next to Hannibal. He turned to watch him - breath slow and rhythmic, he appeared to still be deeply asleep. The feelings of safety and being cared for were still so strong in his mind that he felt his chest ache at the thought of it. A light touch to Hannibal’s thigh, exposed as the sheet lay tangled around him, and Will was sitting up to look at him.

It was rare to see the man unguarded. He was often awake before Will and fell asleep after him. To watch him like this, unnoticed, was a rare gift. The sheet was gently moved from his torso before Will pressed a tentative hand to his hip. Warm. Alive. He slid his fingers over the smooth skin, tracing the arch of bone that lay beneath his searching hand.

If Hannibal felt it, he gave no indication. So Will continued on, until his hand dipped between the slightly spread thighs. He sat up on his heels, straddling one of the long, lean legs, and gently pressed his thighs apart.

As he had so carefully and patiently guided Will to sleep, the gift was given back, only upon the other man’s awakening. Hannibal’s cock lay soft - something Will couldn’t deny himself, no matter how hard he tried. He reached out, his touch easy and light.

He teased at Hannibal’s foreskin with playful fingers, sliding it slowly back and forth, not yet revealing the sensitive head beneath. Every so often he looked up, watching for signs that he was soon to wake. After a time he abandoned his hands and stretched out on his side. He lay his head against Hannibal’s thigh, soft curls pressed up against the warmth of his skin. A tentative touch, and then Will was drawing him in, swallowing him down slowly and completely.

Hannibal’s palm lay open and relaxed at his side. Will slid their fingers together, waiting for the signs of his awakening. He hummed quietly, letting the feeling vibrate against the other man’s flesh.

Hannibal's wakefulness came by incremental degrees. First, the muscles in his leg, where Will was resting his head, began to twitch almost imperceptibly; if Will's cheek had not been resting on it, he wouldn't have even noticed.

Next, the sound and quality of his breathing changed. Where it had once been regular and indicative of deep sleep, it turned shallower, and eventually louder as his lips parted.

Then, more movement, this time of Hannibal's hips. Of their own accord, they shifted, up and down, by only centimeters. Will was pleased to find Hannibal's cock was hardening against his tongue, in time with these small movements. He guessed it was the sympathetic muscle movements throughout his internal erectile structures; his body working in time and in harmony with itself.

And at last, the most rewarding sign of Hannibal's wakefulness yet...a hand, gently beginning to work its way through Will's hair. He took it as encouragement, sucking harder. A quiet moan was drawn from Hannibal's open mouth. Will drew the now fully-hard length from his lips, and found his head pushed down again. The hips were moving faster. Will obliged the wordless request and established a steady rhythm of sucking and movement.

Will thrilled to hear the unconscious sounds falling from Hannibal’s lips. He lifted his head just enough to take a breath, then quickly sat up, positioning himself between spread thighs. Pressing his mouth over the throbbing length, he swallowed him down slowly.

There was another intoxicating groan, something mumbled in a language Will didn’t understand. Hannibal’s cock felt impossibly thick in his mouth, filling him so completely that he struggled for a moment to take it all in. But soon he fell back into a blissful rhythm, dipping his head up and down as he sucked.

Pulling his hand from Hannibal’s loose grasp, he kneaded his hip for a moment before resting his palm against the sweat-slicked chest. The pulse thundered under his touch. There was a sudden pang of regret at not fetching any lubricant before he started. Will wanted terribly to press a finger inside Hannibal, to stroke him deeply and feel all of the hidden places so swollen with pleasure.

Instead, he settled for lifting his head quickly, a brief lick to his fingers before pushing them near Hannibal’s entrance. There was no penetration, just a slick press against his hole, timed opposite to the growing pressure against his cock. Will was rewarded with a surge of precum, hot and thick against his eager tongue.

Hannibal's conscious mind hadn't completely reasserted itself in his incomplete state of wakefulness; he didn't even realize that the half-pronounced words falling from his lips weren't even in English. A few more syllables, punctuated by ever louder moans, came closer and closer together. He was vaguely aware of beginning to thrust his hips, winding his fingers tighter through Will's sleep-tangled hair.

The fingers pressing softly, but insistently, against his sensitive hole and perineum kept him connected with his body and closed off his mind. Something about being woken this way overrode his usually powerful thoughts, and he acted only on instinct and in response to physical stimulation.

Will felt this, sensed the rhythm of Hannibal's movements as being wholly visceral. He focused on his own breathing, allowing Hannibal to thrust deep into his throat as much as he wished.

A sudden unexpected cry was torn from Hannibal; even Will had not anticipated it. Hannibal's body stiffened suddenly, and Will found himself swallowing around the pulsing length as cum flowed copious and hot against his tongue. He heard Hannibal's voice begin to form words again, repeating his name, voice dark and heavy.

Slowly, Will eased Hannibal's cock past his lips, licking and sucking at the last few drops that spilled from the thick head.

"Will..." The voice sounded more like him now. "What have you done to me?" A note of humor was present there. "I am quite undone."

“Just the way I like you.” Will grinned, delighted. He sighed happily, a quick kiss to Hannibal’s thighs before he bent over the prone man.

“Maybe I should wake you up that way more often?” Hannibal’s lips were claimed in a deep, unhurried kiss before there was even a chance to answer. A barely suppressed groan was muffled by Will’s searching tongue, Hannibal tasting himself.

Will sat back after a moment, bare ass perched teasingly on the other man’s leg. A warm hand snaked around Hannibal’s wrists, tugging.

“Come shower with me."

There was no way to deny him - Hannibal wouldn’t dream of it. And so he let himself be led away, pulled from the bed and brought to the en suite. Will busied himself for a few moments, gathering towels, turning on the shower. He looked rested, Hannibal thought, more so than usual. It pleased him immensely that at least for the moment, he was calmed and present.

“You have so many different soaps, Hannibal.” Will was laughing to himself, head stuck in the cabinet near the shower. It was almost overwhelming, deciding which one to pick. He found himself torn between something that sound French and something that sounded Italian.

“Savon de…” Hannibal listened to him mumble under his breath, a valiant attempt at the pronunciation. Will tipped his shoulder in indifference, as if he were conversing with himself over the matter of which to choose. It wasn’t important, he decided - Hannibal’s scent was intoxicating, whatever he picked would only enhance it.

The one that smelt of orange blossom and something unidentifiably spicy was snatched from the wooden tray. Will thumbed at it for a moment, tracing his finger over a bit of real orange peel mixed in. He turned abruptly, smiling.

“Come on."

Hannibal smiled at his enthusiasm and took the offered hand, stepping into the shower. Almost immediately he found himself under the hot gush of water, body deliciously warm as Will backed him against the stone enclosure. The heady scent of citrus and spice burst forth, carried on the steam that billowed up around them as Will ran the soap under the spray.

“Would you want a washing clo—"

“Absolutely not.” Will arched an eyebrow, incredulous, before grinning. And clearly, he did not. Confident hands found their way across Hannibal’s chest, slick with scented foam. He rose on his feet to even their heights, and captured Hannibal’s mouth, delighted to hear the quick intake of breath as he pressed his tongue inside.

Hannibal allowed Will to roam his hands freely over his body, slick with soap, let him turn him around to face the cooler marble wall. He reveled in the contrast; the smooth texture of the tiles against his chest, the hot spray of water on his back, Will's hands massaging down to his thighs. Moments of relinquishing his control were rare, and Hannibal chose them carefully. He permitted his mind to drift, as if thumbing through the pages of a book...the case would surely need their attention today, but this moment could be enlarged to fill all the dark spaces of his mind, if only temporarily.

When he was finished, Will turned him back around, gently guiding Hannibal to face him again. This time, his hands soaped the front of his thighs, and he found the muscles there more lax than they had previously been. Hannibal's eyes were half-closed, as if he were capturing this experience to save. Will occasionally found that look on his face, and he treasured it, because he knew it meant that Hannibal was enjoying himself immensely. Fingers traveled to his soft cock, and Will was gratified to hear a soft sigh fall from his parted lips.

The moment passed, Hannibal stirred, and he began to return the favor. He ran his fingers though Will's hair, who tilted back into the water to rinse. When he bared his neck like this, Hannibal bent to softly kiss his pulse.

This act, this mutual washing, though gentle and not a prelude to anything else, was just as intimate as their bedroom contact had been.

Soon, they were both clean, and Hannibal turned off the water. They stepped out, and silently dried off slowly, both with heavy limbs and light heads.

Will was the first to speak. "I have a feeling that there'll be a message from Jack waiting for me. Things have been too quiet. The killer is bound to communicate with us sooner or later, somehow."

"Yes. I imagine you are right," Hannibal replied. "While you are checking in with Jack, I will make us breakfast."

Will dried his hair quickly; the mention of food made him realize how hungry he was.

"Thank you...as it happens, I'm starving. I wonder why..."

He kissed Hannibal one last time, and smiled, before going into the bedroom to find his clothes.

Will made a half-hearted grab at his stash of clothes in Hannibal’s closet.

“Wooden hangers? Who has wooden hangers?” He shook his head and yanked a light shirt from its perch, dressing quickly and without much thought.

The bureau-issued cell sat on Hannibal’s desk, and Will eyed it warily while pulling on his socks. He sat for a moment, seeing Jack in his office, the impatient drum of his fingers, as if he were sitting there for no other reason than to wait for Will’s call.

A sigh of disgust, and then Will was snatching the phone from the table, dialing.

“Will.”

A ring and a half. He cringed, shutting his eyes and clearing his throat by way stalling for a moment.

“Hi, Jack.” The brief silence on the other end of the line even held an air of impatience.

“We’ll need you in right away, as soon as you can get here. There’s been some developments – things we need to go over.” He was shuffling papers – there was the faint noise in the background. With both hands, Will realized, by the slightly muffled quality of his voice, shoulder holding up the phone.

Will nodded in reply, forgetting Jack couldn’t see him.

“Will? Where are you?”

He cleared his throat again. “I’m here. I mean, I’m at…home. I’ll be in as soon as I can. It’s, ah, you know, a bit of a drive.”

“Right.” He was dismissive, unhearing the subtleties – all that mattered was the knowledge that Will was coming in. “As soon as you can then.”

The line clicked off.

He sat for a moment staring at the bed, a smile on his face, the conversation forgotten for a time as he recalled the recent shower together with Hannibal. The smell of breakfast was suddenly apparent, and Will’s stomach growled angrily. He abandoned his reverie for more tangible thoughts, and headed downstairs.

“Smells amazing, Hannibal.”

Will came up behind him, lightly touching his side. It almost seemed sinful to interrupt him, like bothering a sculptor, mid-swing of the hammer and chisel. But Hannibal smiled, setting down the tools of his trade. Plates were taken down and utensils set out, while Will peered down into the pan.

“Omelette aux épinards frais,” he explained, as if Will could understand; but he inferred it was fresh spinach amongst the eggs.

He nodded, smiling at the pleased look on Will’s face.

“And fresh lemon curd, with clotted cream. I think you will find it a suitable accompaniment.”

He returned to his post after setting the table and finished the remainder of the dish. A few moments later the range was turned off and Hannibal was dishing up breakfast, with a cup of strong coffee poured straight behind.

They ate in comfortable silence; the only sound was Will’s pleased sigh at the delicious meal. Eventually, entirely too soon Will decided, the meal was finished. The remains were cleared away, the dishes cleaned, and then they were going to the sitting room - fresh coffee in Will’s cup and tea for Hannibal.

Will leant back, stretched out his legs, and nudged closer to Hannibal as sat.

“I will be coming with you today, when you meet with Jack."

“I told him it would be a while before I was in - a few hours."

Hannibal nodded.

“We will want time to talk and to prepare.” He paused and there was a feeling of seriousness that descended. “Will. The coming days and weeks will not be easy. You must know this."

Nodding, Will looked away. “I know, Hannibal,” he said quietly.

“You must come to me. Always. But especially in times such as these. There will be days when you cannot trust your own mind, your own thoughts, even your own physical self. When this happens, you mustn’t let the darkness overtake you, as it almost has already. You must cling to the thought of me, to us, when this happens, as it inevitably will. Do you understand?"

Will had closed his eyes. Hannibal’s words filtered in, as if coming from a great distance, but they were clear and true and bloomed in his mind as a beacon of hope for what horrific days surely lay ahead. He felt a hand touching his shoulder then, the side of his neck, before a thumb stroked gently over his cheekbone. Long fingers threaded through his curls, drawing him close.

“I promise,” Will whispered fiercely.

Hannibal nodded and leaned away, his touch lingering a moment longer, before finally disengaging. He picked up his tea cup, sipping the last of it before carefully putting it down. His gaze played upon it. *Not broken...not today*, he thought.

They sat together and talked, as they had done so often. Will was trying to be forthcoming about all the things he worried most about the case. In the forefront of his mind was the fact that the killer was evidently pursuing a forensic education, both before and after the killings.

"That does not mean you are the same, Will," Hannibal said in measured tones when Will had finally put voice to this.

He ran his fingers through his hair, trying to find the words to explain.

"No. But there are things...you know about them. I've felt righteous in killing, at the very least."

"You do not seek it out. And if you were to fail in your career, you would not resort to recreating it, as this killer has done with their pursuits."

"No, I imagine not. And there's something else. Something I can't quite put my finger on. A duality of this killer. The finesse of the scene is not matched by how the victims died. It's nagging at the back of my brain like a tick on my neck."

Hannibal briefly grimaced at the uncouth metaphor.

"Sorry," Will said. "I need to figure this out. I feel like if I do, I'll know what we need to do."

As if on cue, Hannibal's phone chimed.

"Agent Crawford, no doubt," he said before retrieving it.

It was Jack. The call was brief, a few "yes's" here and there, and Hannibal ending it by saying, "I shall most likely arrive at the same time as Will."

Once he'd hung up, Hannibal smiled.

"That Jack didn't know we were together afforded us the opportunity to have a proper breakfast."

Will laughed quietly. "I'll have to remember that trick."

They left separately and just as Hannibal had said, they walked into Jack's office together.

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Will sinks deeper into his delusion that he is responsible for educating the killer.

"Excellent timing," Jack said as he stood, motioning for Hannibal and Will to have a seat. "I've just heard back from the lab, and they have a few pieces of information for us about the letter."

"What letter?" Will asked with his tone of voice ever-so-slightly failing to conceal his annoyance that Crawford knew what he was talking about, despite him not having mentioned it on the phone. Hannibal tried not to smile.

"Right, I didn't tell you...our killer saw fit to send us something."

He produced a copy of a handwritten note. Will took it immediately, studying it with intense concern. Hannibal watched his face. It twitched as he grimaced. He recalled their earlier conversation about Will's latent feelings of guilt, and could see them written clearly on his features as he read.

Hello Investigators,

Imagine my distress at having my hard work of so many years disassembled so unceremoniously. I would have thought the FBI should appreciate my work in the pedagogy of necrosis. Given that there are no similar installations anywhere near the Academy, perhaps it would have been wiser to allow the meticulous and varied decompositions to run their course? You could have even used it as a training ground once it had been discovered; my gift to you.

But distressed as I was, I was delighted to discover that it was Will Graham himself who was brought in to investigate the scene. His monograph on judging time of death by insect activity could easily be considered my working bible. I do hope you are pleased with my progress. I took great pains to provide the opportunity for the widest range of potentialities.

Despite the questionable ethics of tattlecrime.com, they do give the most accurate information not available in the mainstream press, including names of Special Agents not normally reported on for discretion's sake.

By the time you read this, I will have enacted plans to move into the next phase of my learning. I do hope, Mr. Graham, that if and when it is found, you are there to appreciate its instructive possibilities.

Be seeing you.

Will made a noise, a mix of emotions so deep that even Hannibal failed to decipher them all. He finished reading and handed the letter to Hannibal, who took it with interest, though not as much as was still directed toward Will's reaction.

"What's forensics say? Hand-writing analysis? Method of delivery? Anything." The words tumbled out in an angry rush, Will biting his lip as he glared at Jack.

He raised his hands to stop the onslaught and shook his head.

"These things take time, you know that. A couple hours and we'll have more of a report."

Will grunted in annoyance and raked a shaking hand through his hair, nearly knocking his glasses off in the process. Averting his eyes, he turned to Hannibal, stealing a quick glance at him while he finished reading.

"Any thoughts you might have, Dr. Lecter, would be much appreciated."

There voiced faded into the background and Will let his mind wander:

The bible. My Magnum opus is a field manual for serial killers. A how-to guide. Is that what it is? Is that what I've done?

There was a nauseating mix of anger, fear, and mounting guilt rolling in his stomach. His head pounded, a dull throb behind his eyes and temples that threatened to spill over into pure agony. Aspirin seemed a pale remedy for being a catalyst to a budding serial killer, but he fumbled in his jacket pocket for the bottle anyway. He chewed through three without even bothering with water, the bitterness nothing compared to the bile in the back of his throat.

He came to in the hallway, staring up at Hannibal, the last few moments a blur of parting words with Jack in regards to the case.

"I have to go home," Will said dully. "I have a class to teach tomorrow. Or try to." He made a face and looked down the hallway.

"Will."

He didn't respond, whether out of stubbornness, anger, or mere distraction wasn't clear. Hannibal stole a moment, free from the scrutiny of any passersby in the hallway, and gripped Will's side. Finally he turned his head back, and Hannibal let his hand fall away.

"You are to be very careful on your way home. If anything should happen, you are to call me immediately."

"I will," he said, his voice sincere, despite the flat look across his face. Hannibal nodded, satisfied for now.

Hannibal decided to stay around the BAU until the results about the letter were back. He also decided to let Will have some time to himself. He'd either work things out for himself, or he'd come to a breaking point of some sort. This wasn't a time for intervention.

Jack was in his office, and seemed amenable to talk about the situation. And about Will's state of mind.

"Hannibal, is Will going to be any good on this? He's the only one that can do it right. But he's no good to me if he gets himself confused with the killer."

"Is that what you think will happen, Jack?"

Answering a question with a question, Jack thought. *Of course he is.*

"Isn't it what you think is likely?"

Hannibal considered this for a moment, focusing his eyes on some imaginary object in the middle distance between himself and Crawford.

"I think it is likely that Will could empathize to the point of becoming unable to think clearly. But if it should come to that, I will be here to bring him back to us. There's little to be done until it occurs. Now, should we determine if anything has been revealed by the letter?"

He and Jack went down to the lab, where some of the technicians were wrapping up their work.

"There's very little we can find from this," Jack said after looking at their report, frowning. "The profile Will and presumably you come up with is going to be the make-or-break for this. I'm counting on you to keep Will in the game."

Hannibal inclined his head. "I have not failed to so far."

. . . . .

Will drove home amidst a flurry of beating wings and the low drone of insect noises.

He didn’t want to tell Hannibal they’d returned - shortly after reading the letter; Will doubted Hannibal would have let him out of his sight, let alone drive home alone.

Eyes focused on the road with all his energy, he drove carefully, arriving to a house full of dogs eager to see him.

“Hey…” Will said quietly, amid the flurry of excited greetings. He busied himself setting out more food and water, too sick to his stomach to even think of making something for himself.

Once fed, he sent them all outside and tried to organize the materials he needed for class. It was going to be a disastrous lecture, that much was apparent. Barely able to organize his own thoughts enough to put the papers in order, Will debated canceling the session altogether. Even before the idea even left his mind he knew it wasn’t an option - it would draw too much attention. They’d question his ability even more than they already were.

He looked down at himself - wet with sweat, disheveled. Through the drive home he'd managed to soak through his entire shirt, despite having the air conditioner on the entire time. He peeled off his clothes once in the bathroom, a strange and unsettling mix of overheated and chilled as he stepped into the shower.

If for no other reason, the drum of water drowned out the noises. The insects had moved into the walls. He was sure of it. It was rhythmic pounding, a sharp and repeated thud against the interiors of the house. He wondered, vaguely, if they could come through the plaster. The scratch of their legs, the frantic pulsating of their wings, struck a discordant tune inside his head.

Turning off the taps, Will sighed deeply. He dried quickly, dressing haphazardly. The dogs called back in, he poured himself a sizable glass of whiskey and sank gratefully into the couch.

The night, like his sleep, came and went - the period in between a dark, blank spot. Will awoke with a start in the same place he landed the night previous. Stiff, achy, he found the tumbler of whiskey at his feet. Empty. He scrubbed his hand over his face, dressed sluggishly, and let the dogs out.

There was no sense in trying to organize his lecture notes, he had tried the last night and failed. More food and water set out, and the animals called in, and he was headed to his car. Will sped off toward class, a nervous look in the rearview mirror as a black, swirling trail of bugs followed him down the highway.

. . . . .

"Social exclusion, Jack. I see it written between all of the lines of this letter, as well as in the killer's actions."

"How is that, Dr. Lecter?"

"This talk about the 'bodyfarm' being a 'gift' to us. It speaks to a deep sense of wanting to be appreciated for one's intelligence and resourcefulness. That would indicate that they had not been appreciated in the past. And failure to finish a course of study does not usually result in such extreme measures. This killer had high expectations put upon them in this field as a child. I expect that their parents are no longer living, but that the need to be successful they inculcated never receded. Inability to connect with peers made this field too difficult to navigate in conventional ways."

"So they would have stood out?" Jack enquired.

"Undoubtedly. I am sure there have been many odd students that have come and gone in the Academy, but this one would have been both strange and secretive. Combine that with subsequent failures in other programs, and one or both parents in a similar field, and you will find your killer, Jack."

Hannibal looked again at some of the photos of the victims.

"One thing is strange, however. This killer would also have stood out among those killed. Prostitutes and young homeless people tend to be on the watch for those that would do them harm. They would have had to move among them undetected. Yes...quite inexplicable."

At the same time the profile was being fleshed out by Hannibal, Will was attempting to teach his class. Hannibal thought he might wait around until it ended, to see if Will would join him for dinner. They spent the next hour or so looking at evidence, and trying to make connections.

Just as Hannibal was bidding farewell to Jack, the profile as complete as it could be at this juncture, Jack received a phone call. Hannibal watched his face contort and his eyes widen.

"When?...Where?...*HOW many??*...Damn it! All right, you know what to do. Get everyone over there. Set up a perimeter around the complex and have the place searched. No one touches the bodies until we can get our people out there, and get the damn local PD away. They take pictures and talk."

He almost slammed the phone down, but restrained himself at the last moment.

"It's bad, Hannibal. This time it seems like our dropout has set up an autopsy facility. It's in an abandoned meat packing plant just outside of Baltimore. Place had its refrigeration rooms turned back on. It's big, though, dozens of offices, places to hide. And there's at least two dozen bodies."

Jack picked up the phone again, and called in an agent, a new one Hannibal hadn't seen before. He looked terrified to be summoned.

"Weiss, is it? Go down to Mr. Graham's classroom and get him in here. Tell him we have more bodies. Now!"

Hannibal nearly laughed at how relieved he seemed to be dismissed.

. . . . .

It was going about as well as Will had imagined.

Not looking over his lecture notes left him surprised, in the most unpleasant of ways, when he realized the topic for the evening: rates of decay of subjects found in outdoor arenas, using entomological decomposition as a primary dating method.

He was sick already, and the lecture had barely begun. A sea of faces, all too eager to hear him, swam before his eyes. It was horrifying to realize how interested he was in the science behind it; how, underneath the terror of the most recent case, he had thrilled to see something in theory become a reality.

Will clutched his stomach mid-sentence, stumbling faintly over his words.

He looked out into the mass students and their curious faces. They were watching him, unnerved. Despite the relative strangeness they encountered during his lectures sometimes,

there was an uneasiness in the room this time. He dropped his hand, trying to get himself together, but the jumble of thoughts continued on.

What am I feeling, he wondered, internally. *Guilt? Empathy? My own body recoiling in horror of what I instinctively know I'm capable of?*

The internal argument was interrupted by someone standing at his elbow. He hadn't even seen them come in. Another agent, someone working for Jack. *He mumbles too much*, Will thought angrily, as the investigator leaned in too close to Will's liking.

"…another group of bodies have been found. Crawford says you're to report in, to review the data."

The bile was rising in the back of his throat again. Quickly this time, when he heard the words.

A nod toward the man, the only acknowledgement he could make. The agent was talking to him still, but the words weren't registering. Will nodded again, as if that would make him go away.

More bodies, he thought to himself. *I'm directly responsible. As guilty as whoever put them there.*

A quick swallow of water to clear his throat, it had suddenly gone so dry, as the agent left the room - he looked down into his cup, the liquid tasting entirely too strange upon his tongue. Will grimaced, confused as a hallucination took hold. The vision, the delusion, came on quickly and unforgiving: He stared into a ceramic mug filled with earthen matter, like the swamp from which the first bodies were pulled. Twigs, wet leaves, a slick swirl of swamp mud along the surface seemed to replace the water there only moments ago. He yelped as a shaking hand let go, the item falling to the floor. It hit the ground,
shattering spectacularly across the tile.

The pregnant pause of stillness, right before the cup shattered, dissolved into a frenzy of noise.

There was an excited and frightened murmur of students as they watched his breakdown happening before their eyes. A few stood quickly, chairs clattering back to the floor, several more were already headed to exits, slipping out of their seats as fast as possible.

Will tore his eyes away from the shattered mug to find what he believed to be a torrent of swarming insects. They hovered nosily in the room, wings beating with a pulsating drone.

He instinctively stepped back, as if it would save him from the onslaught.

"Get out!" He screamed, heart thundering loudly in his ears.

The remaining group of students rushed out, the sound of footfalls registering as nothing more than insect noises to Will's ears. The pitch increased as they slid past him, pooling around his face with an alien curiosity before swirling out the door.

Will grabbed his chest, unable to stop the violent shaking that was pulling at his limbs. The ground, still slick, rose up to meet him as he stepped awkwardly in the puddle of water. He fell hard on his hip, scrambling backward against the podium before pulling himself up.

The office. He had to get to his office. Lecture notes scattered, briefcase left open, he tore through the hall, running as fast he could. He slammed the door shut once inside, leaving the lights off. Will collapsed in the corner, the first stirrings of hyperventilation taking hold, and squeezed his eyes shut.

The agent he'd sent to inform Will came back into Jack's office from the hallway, without knocking. Crawford looked affronted, and opened his mouth to bark a demand for an apology, when the agent interrupted.

"I'm very sorry, Agent Crawford. I told Mr. Graham like you asked, and I was on my way back and was nearly knocked over by a group of his students as they fled his classroom. He's had some kind of, well, *episode,* and he's locked himself in his office."

Hannibal and Jack looked at each other in stunned silence for the briefest of moments, before Jack said, "Dr. Lecter, I think you should handle this."

"I agree entirely. Please, allow me to bring him home. I will call you when I am sure he will be fine. We will join you tomorrow. I assume you will need at least that much time?"

Jack nodded yes. With that, Hannibal brushed past the agent, and down to Will's office, just a few doors down from his usual classroom.

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

> Will retreats to the confines of his office after his dissociative episode; Doctor Lecter pays him a visit to bring him back, using his singular techniques.

Will lay on a small couch.

He had brought it into his office one autumn, when he found himself at the Academy much more than usual. The desk chair had become decidedly uncomfortable and so one night he had it delivered, pushing it all the way from the shipping entrance to his office.

He retreated there sometimes, for various reasons, but tonight it was the only place his fragmented mind told him to go.

Will shook, with unrelenting panic. Face pale, lips just as devoid of color from the shallow breathing, he wondered if he were dying. He squeezed his eyes shut, curling in on himself.

Thoughts came too quickly to hold to any for more than a moment. They tumbled through his mind, dark and unforgiving. Visions of death - others, his own, were constant behind his closed eyes. He wrapped his arms around himself, trembling hands catching in his sweat-soaked shirt.

Too deep into his own despair, Will failed to hear the door to his office being slowly opened.

Hannibal had gone out to his car to retrieve a small medical bag. He came in quietly, not wanting to startle Will, but also wishing that his presence not immediately be known. He set out a few needed items on the desk in the office, where he would be using them.

He slipped off his outer garments, including his tie, loosened his collar, and rolled up his sleeves.

Sitting down gently next to Will, he put his hand on his thigh, firmly and reassuringly.

"Will? Will, I need you to talk to me, and to try to sit up. This is Doctor Lecter. I've come to check to see if you are well."

Stirring, and releasing his legs which he had been holding up to his chest, Will slowly complied. Soon, he was upright, and rubbing his eyes.

"Good," Hannibal said. "Now, when you are able to walk, I need you to go and sit on the desk. I must examine you. Can you do that for me?"

Will stared blankly ahead, but nodded, and taking Hannibal's arm, he stood and walked on shaking legs to his desk. Hannibal knew his body was flooded with adrenaline, and was going to need to find a way to release all this tension that had built up in his body.

When he was seated, legs dangling off the side, Hannibal put on the stethoscope he had set aside.

"I'm going to remove your shirt now, Will, and loosen your belt." He knew the importance of describing everything he would do to Will, throughout this entire process.

Soon, Will was sitting on his desk, stripped to the waist, and beginning to breathe more normally. The stethoscope pressed to his chest, to the front and then to his back, revealed that his heart was still pounding.

"You're doing well. Your heart rate is still elevated, but you are improving. Now...I'd like you to lift up just a little, to enable me to remove your trousers."

Will wasn't really thinking of how unusual this was, getting a thorough medical exam in his office. He wasn't even entirely aware that he was *in* his office. But the soothing voice and firm instructions from Doctor Lecter, whom he trusted, provided an anchor to a reality that had begun to seem like it was slipping away.

He lifted himself a little bit when he felt his belt being removed. It was slipped from the loops and set in a nearby chair.

Will’s mind wandered still, stuck in jumble of discordant images.

He felt someone touching him against the leg, shoes and socks taken carefully from his feet. A moment later he was moved slightly, pants being eased down his hips, but they caught at his knees. There was an immediate sense of panic, of being trapped, and Will struggled against whatever was touching him.

“Will. Will, I want you to lie back.” Doctor Lecter’s face swam into view again and strong arms were suddenly at Will’s sides, guiding him back on the desk. A hand was placed against his heaving chest, the other across his sweat-slicked brow, as if taking his temperature in an impromptu fashion. In his heightened state, Will failed to realize the importance of the ritual, though it had its intended effect: he calmed visibly as the doctor touched him.

“Very good.” There was a gentle smile down at him.

Will blinked slowly, watching as the stethoscope was placed against his chest once more, the doctor counting off the seconds in his head. A few moments later it was taken away, Doctor Lecter placing it around his neck as he walked back to the front of the desk. His pants were slipped off more easily this time and with them, Will’s boxers. He gasped at the coldness against his bare skin, shivering slightly.

“Doctor Lecter, please help me,” Will moaned softly, trying to stop the agitated tremor in his body.

Warm hands caressed the insides of his thighs, so firmly and gently.

"Of course, Will. You're quite safe. I'm going to help you relax. That is what will help you the most right now."

The hands continued to massage his trembling muscles; Hannibal only paused briefly to pull up a chair, and sit at the edge of the desk.

"I need you to place your heels on the edge of the surface. I want to be able to massage you more completely. Can you do that?"

Will slowly complied, and was rewarded just as Hannibal had mentioned, thumbs expertly pressing into his flesh, slowing and then stopping the tremors.

"Very good," Hannibal said. He had to concentrate to retain his tone of clinical detachment; Will was now spread inches before him, thighs parted and falling ever more open as he calmed. He permitted himself a near-silent intake of breath before continuing:

"You are going to feel something sliding against you, in a very sensitive place. As I said, it will help you relax..."

He could wait no longer to press his tongue to Will's perineum, and felt arousal burn through his veins as he heard Will moan from deep within his diaphragm.

“I am quite pleased to see some color returning to your skin.”

Will’s lips, once pale from fear, flushed pink - the same color that was slowly streaking down his chest and sides. His mouth dropped open with a long sigh, hands finally uncurling as he slowly relaxed.

Hannibal rubbed his palm along Will’s hip when he heard the slight hitch return to his breathing.

“Just deep breaths for me, Will. You can do that, yes?”

Will was incapable of speech, though he responded when the last of the tension drained from his limbs. He lay open before Hannibal, thighs parted widely for his searching tongue.
A slight tremor wracked his body, desire pooling warm in his chest as he moaned again, fingers stretching out toward the doctor.

Hannibal permitted himself a moment of distraction, and looked up at Will’s face - eyelids heavy, half closed, his head rolled to the side as another soft gasp fell from his lips.

Wanting to keep him in this state for as long as he could hold him there, Hannibal let his tongue slide along the places he knew would give Will the most pleasure. Down to his entrance, which he regarded as rather more pink than most, and certainly enjoyable to caress in this most intimate way. And *ah*, the sounds that were drawn from Will's parted lips, moans and sighs that emanated from deep within him, as if he was expressing an emotion fully indescribable with mere words.

Probing inside with his tongue soon followed, altering the cadence of the sounds, making them sound heated and desperate. Will's hips moved, his body pleading for more. And Hannibal obliged, as he always did. Stiffening his tongue just as he drew it out, feeling the resistance lessening each time by degrees. It was a beautiful process to him, something tangible he could read to know when Will was ready for more.

One last, long, slow-motion flourish of lips and tongue, followed by the new presence of fingers, one and then two. He'd begin by stretching, then settle them at Will's prostate. Here he'd stay, until Will's cock was wet. This was where he'd bring him back to himself. Hannibal kept his fingers mostly inside, drawing them out just enough to graze along that place, until Will's noises began to turn into words.

He watched Will's expression - gaze still distant, but his eyes were open now as his arousal grew. Cock twitching, a thick stream of pre-cum stained his belly with each new press of Hannibal's fingers. A quick slide through the gathering wetness, and then Hannibal was gently rubbing the underside of the hard length.

"Doctor Lecter," Will cried. He arched his back, almost violently, before slumping back against the desk, hips thrusting desperately in the space between them.

Hannibal felt a curious tension building inside the man before him, who lay nearly helpless with pleasure. The unimaginable heat of Will's body grew more so, muscles beginning to contract almost rhythmically against fingers buried so deeply inside him.

"More, please!"

As delicate and precise as his tongue, Hannibal touched Will with his other hand, slick thumb sliding along the shaft before circling the dark, engorged head.

"You are quite swollen from the treatment, Will. Surely you are able to feel how much?" Forefinger curled over his cock, while the palm of his hand came to rest along the straining flesh.

Will whined, torn between sinking back on the fingers still buried in his ass, or thrusting forward into Hannibal's waiting hand. He was leaking freely now, Hannibal marveling at the beauty of the involuntary response and the quiet, needy sound that spilled from his lips.

"This is a startling amount of fluid. I trust that your release will be just as," he paused, voice dark, barely able to keep his tone level, "…copious."

Although Hannibal wasn't *completely* averse to using Will's body for his own pleasure while he was in an extreme dissociative state, the purpose of the exercise today was to bring him back. He formulated a plan. If looking at something horrific had put him here, surely a more pleasant image before his eyes would have the opposite effect. He slowly removed his fingers, savoring the needy little sounds Will made as the contact temporarily ceased.

He cleaned his hands, and took out his stethoscope.

"Will, I need you to sit up in order for me to monitor your heart rate. Here..." he took a cushion from the chair, and a smaller pillow, and wedged them under Will's back, who nodded and tried to assist Doctor Lecter as best he could.

"Good. You are a most cooperative patient..."

He gave a cursory check of Will's heart; it was pounding, but regular. *Excellent,* he thought. *Aroused but no longer frantic.*

*"*And now, to address this *condition* you appear to have. Can you see how much you are leaking? Sit forward just a little more...that's right."

Just as he managed to curl his back enough to gain full view of his cock, he saw Doctor Lecter place the flat of his hand over it, and press a surreptitiously lubed finger back inside of him. From this vantage point, he could see himself being penetrated perfectly.

"As I put pressure right...*here*...observe the effects." Hannibal expertly stroked his prostate, alternating between that, and withdrawing and entering Will again. Will's face was transfixed with open-mouthed concentration.

He kept this up for a few minutes, wanting to ensure that Will became focused on his body, and the visual feedback he was getting certainly aided in this process. One last moment of deep massage, and he finally withdrew.

Will was breathing deeply and regularly now; Hannibal could tell he was almost back to himself. His eyes were completely clear, but he still seemed not quite able to speak.

The medical bag held one more surprise. He took from it what he needed next: a long, tapered plastic syringe. It had no needle, but was rather meant to be inserted. It contained a measured quantity of lubricant that could be delivered strategically.

"I want you to watch as I perform this procedure, Will."

Hannibal placed the tip of the syringe just inside Will's entrance.

"Watch closely."

He pressed it inside, and simultaneously drew it back out while ever so slowly depressing its plunger.

A small noise escaped Will lips, a desperate little cry of confusion and pleasure. The object felt strange, moving so deeply inside him. There was a brief feeling of pressure, the coolness of the lubricant filling him ever so slightly. The syringe was drawn out gently, the last pulse dampening his skin as Hannibal set it aside. He returned to Will’s side, grasping his shoulder.

“That must have felt strange,” Hannibal smiled, “but you did very well.”

A fine tremor had settled in Will’s limbs. He grasped the edge of the desk, knuckles white from holding on so tightly. A look of pleasured concentration graced on his features, brows knit together as he watched Hannibal.

He groaned softly, trying to speak.

“W-why?”

“Hmm?” Though Hannibal had heard him perfectly, he endeavored to keep Will speaking, to hasten his return to the here and now. He touched Will’s arm, purposefully rubbing a thumb against his fingers until they started to uncurl from the desk.

“Ah, there we are…” Hannibal massaged his palm for a moment, waiting patiently for the words to return again, before moving to the other hand.

“Why did you put that inside me?” Will stuttered faintly, shivering.

“The procedure was necessary, of course, to deliver the lubricant deeply inside you, Will. Right where it will be most effective.”

Chest heaving, Will’s breathing deepened considerably as the thought formed in his mind. He reached out toward Hannibal, cock pulsing thick and full against his thigh.

“P-please, Dr. Lecter,” Will whimpered, breathless, “please fuck me."

"Right here? On your desk, in your office? Are you not concerned that someone would hear you while you are being taken?"

"Don't care," Will managed to say, quickly and without stammering.

Hannibal caressed the insides of Will's thighs, widening circles made with his thumbs, until he was spreading him open even more.

"Perhaps it could be therapeutic...," he teased. "You must be beginning to feel uncomfortable, propped up this way. Just a moment longer?"

He nodded, and was rewarded by seeing Hannibal unzip his trousers, revealing that he was fully hard himself. Will's breath came faster and harder now, cock leaking at the sight, and in anticipation. He was starting to understand with greater clarity what was being done to him; Hannibal had to bring him to this point, to distract him from...what? He couldn't remember what had led up to this, other than a vague sense of unease clouding the corners of his memory. All that mattered was what was happening, here and now. Even the echo of his previous distress vanished as he saw the head of Hannibal's length begin to press into him.

Hannibal advanced and withdrew like this, until he was certain Will's attention was fully focused on the sight. Finally, he shifted forward, and simultaneously put a bracing arm around Will's back while entering him to the hilt. Will's breath left his body, and he could do nothing but let go of the desk, and hold onto Hannibal's hips as he rocked into him, firm, short strokes that filled him so completely.

The surge of adrenaline, that had formerly left him nearly unresponsive, now coursed through his body with a much more enjoyable intention.

“Harder,” Will gasped, one hand tangled in Hannibal’s dress shirt, the other with a thumb looped through the belt tabs of his trousers. The good doctor obliged of course, with a series of thrusts that stole Will’s breath away.

No longer afraid of slipping into his former state, he closed his eyes for a moment, savoring the heat of Hannibal’s body and the unrestrained passion between them.

The position on the desk left little leverage, but Will leant back slightly, allowing Hannibal to sink in even deeper. His ass was already unbearably sensitive, entrance stretched and yielding to thick shaft buried inside him. Each new thrust, each drive forward sent the swollen ridge of Hannibal’s cock gliding over his prostate.

The entire act was animalistic. Raw. It cemented him back in his body as nothing else could. And so, when he caught his lip between his teeth, biting down to keep from crying out, he asked for the one thing he knew they both wanted:

“I said harder,” Will growled, “fuck me harder, Doctor Lecter."

Realistically there was only one way for Hannibal to fulfill this request, and that was to hook his arms through Wills' at the elbows, and tip him back onto the desk. At the same time, he snatched away the largest cushion behind Will's back. Fortunately there was a smaller one at his head that prevented him from smacking it on the desk, though Hannibal doubted he'd even feel it if he had.

The change of angle allowed Hannibal to thrust deeper still. Will's knuckles turned white as he held onto the edge of the surface, letting the renewed wave of intensity carry him further away from his thoughts. The world was reduced to a singularity where their bodies joined.

All he could do was hold on, and when his screams of *yes* grew too loud, Hannibal covered his mouth. Something about Will's complete inability to control himself sent him over the brink, and he started to cum.

Will could feel every surge, sensitized by Hannibal's tongue and fingers, and the greater slide that accompanied the extra, deep application of lubricant. He began to feel more grounded from it somehow, and when the shuddering orgasm ended, he said "Hannibal..." instead of "Doctor Lecter."

At last he pulled back, and helped Will to lie back upon the desk with greater comfort. He put himself back together, and when he was done, it appeared as if he'd been barely exerting himself at all.

Will, however, was a debauched, blushy mess. An entirely agreeable view to Hannibal, who eased him back and said: "Spread your legs very widely for me."

Though Will immediately missed the feeling of being filled, it was heavenly to rest for a few moments as he lay back on the desk. In control of his mind now, he was better able to direct his physical self. He slid hands, hardly shaking any longer, down the outsides of his thighs before dipping them between heated skin.

He held fast to Hannibal’s gaze for a moment as he pushed himself open.

“Like this, doctor?” he whispered, a wicked grin on his lips when he saw the subtle intake of breath from Hannibal.

The adrenaline from the evening’s activities was at its peak, and Will was hardly able to contain his need and desires to be touched. He hooked his legs over the side of the desk to keep his thighs open, before laying a hand against his stomach. A quick swirl of fingers through the wetness that had gathered at his navel, and then Will’s hand was hovering close to his aching cock.

“Please, Hannibal. Please make me cum."

Hannibal's voice was languid, detached, clinical. "And how would you most enjoy climaxing, Will?"

Will replied, "Touching myself, with you watching. With your fingers inside of me. Tell me how it feels?"

Nodding, Hannibal easily penetrated him with three fingers, and Will tipped his head back. He wasted no time in beginning to stroke himself, fast and hard.

"You are very slick, Will. Hot. I can feel the beginnings of your orgasm. Contracting and squeezing around my fingers."

He thrust them more firmly, matching the tempo of Will's movements. It wouldn't be long...

He was correct in this supposition. Will clapped a hand to his mouth as he lost himself, great splashes striping his belly and chest. Each rough incursion of Hannibal's long fingers bringing another, and another, until he was writhing, dry on his desk.

When he was certain Will had no more left, Hannibal withdrew his fingers, and went to clean up and make himself presentable for them to leave.

Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

In the aftermath of the incident in the classroom, they discuss Will's problems with the case, and relax before the next wave hits them.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will lay on his desk, chest heaving. Lost in the aftermath, he opened his eyes only when he felt something soft moving over his chest and stomach.

Hannibal loomed above, a pale blue surgical cloth in one hand. He worked quickly to clean him, a series of strokes dictated by clinical efficiency. As he rested there, Will imagined Hannibal in the hospital theatre - how precise he must be, his incisions so perfect...

The image faded as he was helped up, and Will scrubbed a hand over his face when he sat forward.

“Sit for a moment, you may have some mild dizziness after that...exertion.”

Will nodded and watched the other man tidy up the office, placing various items back in the leather medical bag. A hot blush stained Will's cheeks at the knowledge of what had just taken place.

“You fucked me in my office.” His face burned with excitement, the image forever cemented in his mind of his own body splayed out on the desk. “Right here. Where I grade papers."

Hannibal turned on his heel, a gaze so direct that Will averted his eyes as he grinned down at his bare feet.

Ducking his head, he gingerly slid off his desk, tired muscles protesting. Will gathered his clothing and dressed as quickly as possible. When he finished, Hannibal approached, smoothing his disheveled hair from his forehead.

“You will come home with me this evening,” he said, the matter not up for debate. Hannibal grasped Will by the elbow, fingers kneading gently along his arm. “We’ll fetch your vehicle at another time. While I suspect that the majority of people have left, I suggest you keep a watchful eye as we leave."

Will nodded and with that, Hannibal was striding confidently from the office.

. . . . .

The trek to the car was uneventful, nary a person in sight in the deserted halls as they arrived in the parking lot. Will slid into Hannibal's Bentley with a heavy sigh. Despite the fact that he was feeling better after "the treatment" - the thought made him blush as he buckled his seat belt - it felt good to be in Hannibal's car. Safe, secluded, with heavy doors and thick glass - it was solid and sheltering from the outside turmoil.

Like Hannibal himself, Will thought, as he heard the engine turn over.

"I think I fell." Will absently rubbed his hip, a vague memory resurfacing from the period before he awoke in his office. "Back in my classroom."

"I will be sure to give your injury my undivided attention when we arrive."

He watched Hannibal's reflection in the window and smirked.

After a few moments they pulled onto the interstate. The faceless blur of the road and the drone of tires on pavement lulled Will into a complacent state. For now, at least, his mind was as blissfully blank as it had been in the office. He reached across the seat without looking, knowing Hannibal's arm sat atop the center console, and grasped him by the hand.

Will rested his head back and stared out the window, the night passing before him as he rubbed his thumb along the strong bones of Hannibal's fingers.

"We're going to have to discuss the case. At least for a few minutes. Better now than when we get back."

Will sighed heavily, knowing that Hannibal was, of course, right as usual. And he definitely wanted to turn his mind to other things later.

"I'm guessing that once the scene is secure, I'll have to go out there. With you, obviously. Tomorrow, later in the morning at the earliest. This killer, they know we're closing in. Things are speeding up, escalating. They don't think we'll catch them, though."

"No?" asked Hannibal. "The increased activity is not out of desperation or impulsiveness?"

Will shook his head as he simultaneously stared out the window, and continued to idly stroke Hannibal's index finger.

"No...they are more *inconvenienced* than scared. We've forced them to move up their timetable, that's all."

He sat in silence after that, and after some time, Hannibal gently extricated his hand from Will's before the drive was done.

"Hannibal..." When Will finally broke the silence, his voice sounded far away. "I can't rely on you to always come and rescue me. As enjoyable as your methods are..."

After Will trailed off, Hannibal said, "I do not think it will become commonplace. Surely you feel more weight from this case than any other. You take too much responsibility, Will. You

are so accustomed to seeing through a killer's eyes that for them to now see through yours, it is inevitably going to make you feel..."

This time, Will picked up the dropped thread of thought: "Inverted. Exposed. My thoughts and ideas disgorged for me to see. I don't like how it looks."

As they nearly had reached their destination, Hannibal had one final thought to impart: "The filter through which those ideas have been sieved is twisted, ugly. Even a lauded masterpiece can become distorted beyond recognition if it is reflected darkly."

Will watched his own reflection. He left much unsaid.

Maybe, this case would be his undoing, he wondered, his internal darkness reflected back so keenly that it overtook him. The *lauded masterpiece* not just distorted, but broken beyond repair.

His reflection dissolved in the glass as a line of dark trees and even darker sky came into view. They loomed before his eyes, black and shapeless, like dark waves on a calm but unforgiving sea.

“Nighttime waters,” Will mumbled to himself, without explanation.

But then the images were fading as they pulled on to the street, the mansions lining up in a stately but indifferent manner before them. Save for Hannibal’s. Will smiled slightly when he saw it.

“I would be pleased if you would join me for wine, before we retire, Will.” They walked slowly to the house, Will trailing behind as he fumbled with his bag. He nodded as Hannibal open the door for him, and went inside.

“Of course,” he replied, hoping there would be other activities to follow as well. He grinned, despite himself.

Hannibal looked so pleased, Will thought, as he departed the kitchen, returning moments later in different clothing. A loose shirt, light pants, as he pulled on an apron and washed his hands. Will watched him for a few moments before going to change and cleanup.

He returned to find a light, chilled wine had been taken out, set on the marble countertop, and a few sweet pieces of fruit to be washed and cut. *Like watching someone dance*, thought Will, as he regarded Hannibal moving about the kitchen.

The fruit was cut perfectly and mounded into a bowl, and a simple dressing of raw clover honey, lime, and a chiffonade of mint drizzled on top.

Hannibal set out two glasses of white wine before sliding in next to Will, the bowl of fruit to be shared between them. He turned, his expression and words deliberate as he spoke:

“No talk more of the case tonight, Will. Whatever took place today, should it still trouble you tomorrow, we will speak of it then."

Will nodded, relieved.

Hannibal smiled and picked up a sliver of peach between his fingers, and Will instinctively opened his mouth. He felt an unmistakable spark of arousal as it was pressed gently to his tongue. Hannibal leant in slowly, kissing the honey from his lips.

“Delicious,” he whispered, as he watched Will swallow.

Will was quite interested in leaving his unpleasant experience earlier in the day as far behind as possible. This seemed like both the easiest and most enjoyable way to make that happen, so he played along, encouraging Hannibal by slowly licking his lips.

Hannibal's eyes widened in surprise for just a fraction of a second, before understanding. He dipped his finger in the honey alone, and brought it to Will's lips. Will closed his eyes, and sucked the proffered digit, running his tongue along it until it was clean.

He opened his eyes when the finger was withdrawn, to see Hannibal coating his own lips with the substance. Slowly, Will leaned forward and applied his tongue to Hannibal's mouth, and before long, there was nothing else in the world except their sweet, hot kisses.

The wine had brought a heaviness to Will's limbs, and he knew he'd not be able to stay awake indefinitely. Reluctantly breaking the kiss, he took one last sip.

"I need to get cleaned up before bed...wait for me?"

Hannibal sat back and smiled.

"Always."

And with that, Will was heading upstairs to shower.

Undressing quickly, he caught his reflection in the mirror as he passed. Dark circles under tired eyes. Were others starting to take notice of his…unstableness, he wondered. They certainly would after tonight. But he pushed the thought from his mind. At least for now, for the evening, he still had enough mental energy to let the idea slip away.

He smiled to himself as he stepped into the stone enclosure, the hot drum of water cascading down his back.

Hannibal had begun buying Will his own selection of soap, and the thought of that pleased him as he ran the bar over his skin. It had vague undertones of oak and moss and something else unidentifiable that conjured up images of fresh rain. He assumed Hannibal found the bouquet to be agreeable with his own unique scent, so Will took another pass with the luxurious soap before finishing.

He rinsed and dried quickly, then padded naked into the dimly lit bedroom.

The room was unlit, but Will could nevertheless see, as Hannibal had opened the windows fully. Both moonlight and a delicious breeze streamed in through them.

Hannibal was stretched out on the bed, the light cover and sheet turned down. While Will had been showering, he'd undressed, prepared himself, and was laying back on his side, head back. He was stroking his hard, slickened cock, and Will's breath caught when he took in the sight of him. Small muscles trembled in his strong, smooth thighs. Will could tell he was lost in a memory, most likely of being in the office earlier that day. He was going slowly, his other hand skimming the length of his body, enjoying himself.

Will watched for a moment, until he could wait no longer. He sat lightly on the edge of the bed, and turned, until he was lying alongside Hannibal, who stilled his hand, and wrapped it under Will, the other draped across his chest. He sighed as he pulled him closer.

He sank into the embrace, head resting against Hannibal's shoulder. Skilled fingers stroked over his heart, the rhythm slowing, at least for a while, as he relaxed. The fragrant breeze, finally cool after weeks of oppressive heat, slipped over his skin.

Will shivered in Hannibal's arms at the mix of sensations.

"You feel so good," Will sighed. He felt heavy and sleepy from the wine, but a slow arousal was building, spurred on by Hannibal's hard length pressing against him.

"You were imagining something, when I came in..." Will trailed off. He moved a hand back, scratching his nails down Hannibal's thigh. The muscles quivered under his touch, as they had only moments ago when Hannibal was touching himself.

Hannibal moved in closer, his length sliding in to the cleft of Will's ass, where it seemed to fit so perfectly. He held Will's hip, and rested his chin just in the crook of his neck, to talk directly into his ear. His full lips pressed against the lobe, and he said:

"I was thinking of how needy you were today, Will. You were completely free. The sounds you made as I worked my tongue inside of you in particular were *quite* memorable."

Will involuntarily arched his back, the memory of how that felt coursing through him like a drug. He remembered it like a vivid dream. But it had been real, and he wanted to commit it to memory as Hannibal had.

Hannibal continued: "I could feel how much you desired. You were so hot, so alive. You took everything I could give, and it was not enough. That's why you need me now, is it not?"

Will whimpered in agreement.

Thoughts lingering on what had taken place, he let his mind drift back to that time. He saw himself as both an active participant and an observer - how it looked to be laid out on his own desk as Hannibal's tongued pressed inside him.

A deep shudder passed through him, Hannibal surely knew he was recreating the scene in his mind. Will moaned abruptly as he imagined being spread open, Hannibal's lips against the most sensitive of areas. Another shiver in those strong arms and then Will was moving his hips, tentatively thrusting his ass against the hard length he wanted so desperately inside him.

Will groaned, such a needy sound, as warm fingers pressed briefly at the underside of his cock. He responded almost instantly, the same noise falling repeatedly from his lips, without conscious thought.

“Such a sensitive area for you,” Hannibal breathed, teeth briefly biting the lobe he had drawn into his mouth. “Right…here…” He rubbed his thumb over the same spot again, savoring the feeling of Will’s cock surging in his hand.

The movements that Will was making were almost more than Hannibal could bear. He gently pressed just the head of his cock inside Will's entrance, still open and stretched from earlier. He went slowly; knowing Will was still aching from how hard he'd fucked him in his office.

"I need you to take some control for yourself, Will. Go at a pace that is comfortable for you."

Will set the rhythm, taking more and more of Hannibal's length inside in such a way that didn't hurt. Only when he finally settled against Hannibal's thighs, did he begin to move at all.

"Tell me," Hannibal continued, thrusting gently, "when I was watching you masturbate for me, laid back on your desk, what was in your mind?"

To encourage the memories to flow, he took Will's hand and wrapped it around his own cock, and covered it. He felt the first beads of precum starting to gather along the slit.

Will sighed deeply as he sank into memory.

“You were able to penetrate me so easily with your fingers."

Hannibal made a pleased sound at the image. Will let his head fall to the side, an invitation the other man could not ignore. The barest hint of teeth closed over the offered flesh, Hannibal’s lips pressing softly against Will’s pulse.

More fluid gathered at Will's swollen cockhead, Hannibal swiping a thumb through it, even as Will continued to slowly masturbate himself. There was a delicious counter-rhythm that had developed - a languid stroke of his hand, followed by the slow thrust of Hannibal’s hips.

Will wondered vaguely if Hannibal felt as much pleasure as he did. His cock pulsed at the thought, the wetness dampening their shared grasp.

“I wanted you filling me. To feel me as I was going to cum.”

A small whimper escaped him as Hannibal eased forward slightly, resting more of his weight against Will. He was deeply penetrated in this way, comfortably pinned to the bed, as Hannibal’s rolled his hips in a gentle rhythm.

“I needed you to know how tight I was, how much I wanted you inside me."

Hannibal kissed the back of his shoulder, breathing in Will's arousal; he kept the steady pace of rocking into him, slowly but deeply, angling his movements to stimulate Will's prostate.

"You felt wonderful...I should like to feel it again, Will. Just as we are now."

He moved his hand to Will's hip, who understood that he was to continue on his own. The hand strayed to graze Will's nipple, hard and sensitive.

"Can you give me what I want?" Hannibal held onto him with greater strength now, as Will eagerly complied with his request. He was so immersed in the experience, of both where he was now, and the memory of his office. Safe and warm in Hannibal's bed one moment, then caught in the reminiscence of being so wanton and lascivious, and how Hannibal had so coolly taken his pleasure from him...

“I would give you anything you want,” Will mumbled, head falling to the pillow beneath him.

Groaning, he shifted under Hannibal’s weight, rising up slightly to meet the penetrating rhythm. Will reveled in the slight ache from being taken again, so deeply and completely.

His heart thundered, as it had in the office, not so long ago. He knew Hannibal could feel it, the doctor’s palm pressing flat against his chest before teasing fingers strayed back to his nipple, pinching lightly between forefinger and thumb.

An unintelligible noise fell from his open mouth as the abrupt stirrings of release coursed through his tense body. Breath hitching almost painfully, Will stroked himself harder, faster, until he felt himself spilling into his hand, the first great torrent hot against his skin.

“Anything you want, Hannibal,” Will cried, breathless.

Hannibal kept his steady, slow pace, riding Will through each wave. He savored the contractions that rhythmically pulsed around his cock. As Will's orgasm began to recede, Hannibal's began. He did not cry out, but rather whispered quiet words of praise to Will, of how perfect he felt, how beautiful it was to fill him with semen, so much that he leaked all over his thighs.

At last, Hannibal stilled, resting inside, while they both caught their breaths. Will began to drift, not yet asleep, but lost in a haze of bliss. Hannibal splayed his hand on his chest, feeling the beating of his heart slow and regulate by degrees.

He wanted to know what Will needed at that moment, so roused him gently with a soft kiss to his neck. Gradually, Will began to stir, moving so he could feel that Hannibal's cock remained buried deep within him. He put his own hand over the one at his chest, intertwining his fingers.

Another encouraging kiss, just under Will's ear, and he knew that Hannibal was waiting for him to speak.

Will’s body felt heavy and fatigued in his arms, easy to move as his senses faded and he slowly gathered his thoughts. Hannibal waited patiently, lips pressed gently to his temple this time.

It was with difficultly that Will finally spoke.

“Let me stay like this, until I sleep,” he whispered. Hannibal felt a weak flutter of Will’s muscles, slick hole relaxing against his softening cock. “In your arms, you still inside me."

Drawing him in closer instead of answering, Hannibal held him. Being connected to Will like this was more than just physical; feeling Will at perfect ease in his embrace reinforced his own sense of purpose. That he could give him this refuge united them far beyond the sexual act.

Soon, Will's breathing was regular and shallow, and Hannibal knew he was asleep. Reluctantly and slowly, Hannibal pulled back. The night was warm enough that he didn't need to cover him. His rest was deep enough right away that the movement of disengagement did not wake him, nor cause him to stir. He knew how exhausted Will must be. Pleased, Hannibal went to wash, and gingerly did the same to Will with a soft cloth. He slid in behind Will, replacing his arms around him, and he drifted off.

. . . . .

As it turned out, the fact that Will had a relatively early night and a restful sleep was a fortunate thing indeed, as his phone woke him before 7 am. Jack needed him and Hannibal to come in immediately, as they'd received another letter. The killer was evidently moving up their plans, as Will had feared they would do once cornered. He told Crawford he'd inform Hannibal himself.

They drove directly to the BAU together, not bothering with the pretense of retrieving Will's car and arriving separately. Correctly, they assumed Jack would be too distracted by the case to question their simultaneous arrival.

"Will, Dr. Lecter. I'm glad you could make it in so fast. We'll have to leave the investigation of the new victims to others for now. I'm going to need you both on this."

He produced another letter, which Will and Hannibal read quickly. It was short, but neither of them knew what it meant, at least not at first. It was dated the previous day.

Hannibal was able to watch Will read it, as his eyes scanned the paper for the second and third time. He noted the flutter of his eyelids, which signified that his brain was making a connection.

I'm doing so well, investigators. So much so that I will soon be doing your job for you. I'll have delivered The Gardener to you by tomorrow.

"Who or what do suppose 'The Gardener' is?" Jack asked, noting the looks on both their faces.

"If I am not terribly mistaken, Jack, Will has thought of something useful."

Will closed his eyes, trying to remember something from a class he'd taught, months prior.

"Yes," he said with a measure of regret sounding in his voice. "I think I know."

Chapter End Notes

Looks like longer than one week between updates from here on. Sorry about that! Thanks for sticking with us. Most likely going to be around 15 chapters in the end.

Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Will's exposure to the crime scene leads him down a dark path.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will went over to Jack's cabinet that contained open case files, and looked through it briefly before pulling out a packet.

"I remember when I was teaching about this case, I thought it might have been something to do with plants somehow."

Hannibal and Crawford looked over the file together, and the doctor's eyes lit up.

"He was exsanguinating them? For the purpose of using the blood as both a fertilizer and a deterrent to rabbits?"

"Exactly," said Will, "it made me think of my father. One year we lived long enough in one place to have a garden, and he spread blood meal to keep them away from the lettuce. I made the connection because the bodies had dirt on them, but didn't appear to have been buried. But it was just a vague idea, so I only included it in a number of possible motives."

"So you think our new killer has somehow solved this case?" asked Jack.

"Yes, and it narrows down the timeframe for when they were at the Academy. I probably only talked about this case two or three times."

Jack slapped the file cabinet in celebration.

"Can you tell me the dates? I'll get someone on the enrollment lists."

Will nodded, and went to his office to look through his teaching notes. Hannibal accompanied him.

He unlocked the door when they arrived, fumbling with his keys as he let them inside. Immediately he went to his cabinet, pulling open the doors and removing files.

Hannibal watched for a moment then retreated to a comfortable distance to let Will have his space. He was quite clearly preoccupied, and while Will was always irresistible to Hannibal, he was quite alluring when he wasn’t aware he was being watched.

So many little oddities, eccentricities, Hannibal thought, delighted to be afforded the chance to watch the other man, who was quite unaware of the scrutiny. Will thumbed through a few old folders that were laid out, a tiny tremor in his movements as he scanned the pages. A hand raked absently through his hair before settling on the back of his neck that he tried, unsuccessfully, to crack.

After a moment he moved, pushing the stack to the side, and sat on the desk. Hannibal observed a deep and sudden flush overtake his cheeks, the corner of his mouth twitching in a barely suppressed grin at the thought of what happened there only a day previous.

Hannibal retreated into the shadows to hide his own response - a feral flash of teeth behind the deep curve of his lips.

Will sank into himself after a moment, and many minutes passed before he finally set three folders aside. *Probably imagining himself back in the classroom,* Hannibal mused, as he approached slowly. The darkness unfolded around him and Will looked up, startled.

“Have you located something of value, Will?"

He turned his eyes up to Hannibal who could tell, by the intensity of his gaze, that he had found was he was looking for.

"I was right. Only talked about it twice. Two years ago. Hit too many dead ends, and there were more active cases where we had more specific leads to talk about. A better use of class time."

"And we can assume the blood and plant growth motive is correct now," said Hannibal, looking at the case file. "What does that tell you?"

He watched as Will's eyelids briefly flickered.

"This one's an older man. He's been doing this for a long time, but only recently has he been slipping up...when he was younger, the bodies wouldn't have been found. He's taking people who don't have anyone to miss them."

"Just like our current killer."

"Exactly like. Hannibal, I'm certain they have the same hunting grounds. The 'Gardener' must have gotten recognized. This new one is good."

"Not as good as you." Hannibal stepped into Will's space, and ran a hand down his arm, finally resting it on his hip. Will's breath left his body slowly, as if he'd been holding it. He even smiled a little.

"Let's give this to Jack, and go from there, Will."

Nodding, they left and brought the file. Jack had left though, and the nervous looking agent who had tried to pull Will out of class before told them why.

"You have to meet Agent Crawford, they think they've found the Gardener. An anonymous call was put in, and he's still alive, barely."

They both took off to Hannibal's car, and drove the twenty odd miles to the scene. During this time, Will was quiet, but to Hannibal, seemed to be growing agitated. He kept clenching his jaw.

The behavior only increased the closer the got to the scene. To the casual observer, perhaps even a trained eye, Will appeared no more apprehensive than normal. But to Hannibal, to his uniquely tuned sense of subtleties, the change was paramount.

There was a nearly unnoticeable shift in body language, a slight stiffness in back and shoulders, even as Will sat slightly hunched in the oversized leather seats. As they rounded the corner into a mass of police and rescue vehicles, Hannibal heard the unmistakable sound of Will's soft, increasingly shallow breathing. He stole a glance as Will adjusted his glasses, preparing no doubt for the forthcoming onslaught of agents.

They parked in the designated area and for a moment, neither moved. With only a few seconds to spare before the car was descended upon, Hannibal reached across the console, pressing a steadying hand to Will’s side. He jumped slightly at the contact, staring up at him with haunted eyes.

The touch seemed to spur Will into action. He grabbed the door handle with shaking fingers and stepped outside. Hannibal watched him navigate a few stray agents and, like the proverbial parting of waters, he disappeared into a briefly empty space devoid of people. Will turned back to look for Hannibal, but was swallowed by a swarm of detectives, instantly lost in the sea of movement.

He was jostled for a moment until regaining his footing. A quick scan of his surroundings and he headed to the house, seeing Jack speaking to a number of armed Federal agents near the front door.

Will waited. The crowd brought forth a distinct feeling of pulsating movement, escalating and receding. Will rode it out until at last Jack was free. Just as he approached Zeller brushed passed, Price in tow.

“Not going to want to miss this one, Graham. He’s still alive in there.” Brian bounded up the stairs by Jack.

Will scowled at his back as he disappeared inside, irritated. Adjusting his glasses, he walked up the porch and peered into the house.

“What can you tell me, Jack?"

"He's unconscious. Tied up with barbed wire. Probably drugged, and we almost have him cut out. It's taken forever, Beverly's been cutting each section off piece by piece."

"He wanted us to be delayed. Time to plan the next capture."

Hannibal asked, "He's being treated medically?"

"Yes," Jack replied, "we managed to get a line in almost immediately. He's lost a lot of blood."

When they walked in, it was instantly clear that there had been a fight. The man was tied up in the middle of the dining room, and every piece of furniture in sight was broken, as well as most of the windows. Hannibal noticed Will's reaction immediately, as if his adrenaline spiked and changed his scent. The jaw clenching increased; still, Will remained in control. It was as if his focus on the details of the scene kept him from screaming.

Beverly Katz was nearly finished extricating the man, who looked to be about seventy.

She briefly looked up when she noticed they'd come in.

"It's a good thing he's knocked out. This is like death by a thousand tiny cuts."

There was blood everywhere, soaking a circular pattern almost to the edges of the rug where the chair sat that the old man was tethered too. They'd had no choice but to give him a transfusion *in situ.*

Price came back in, and said, "There's a greenhouse out back with a large quantity of blood, dried, drying, fresh."

Hannibal answered so Will didn't have to: "I'm quite sure you'll find it is all human."

Zeller added: "Why human blood? Can't you just buy the stuff, made from animals?"

Will spoke, not turning to face them, transfixed on the damage in the room.

"He didn't want to use animal products. Nor did he want to poison the rabbits to keep them out of the garden. He's been very careful about taking care of himself. He put up quite a struggle. The man who beat him was just a lot younger and stronger. There's defeat here. I can almost smell it on his blood."

Hannibal smiled. He had noticed it too. It was an astringent smell, of spent muscles and lactic acid.

Will turned to Hannibal, their eyes locking for only the briefest of moments. A subtle nod, too understated for anyone to notice, and then Will was wandering away, stopping briefly to slip on a pair of gloves. He circled the closest blood splatter, tracing it with his eyes. Hannibal watched until he eventually disappeared into the house, going through the rooms one by one.

He was methodical in his approach, if not slightly disoriented in the execution. Each room. Each hallway. Will picked up on the thread of what had happened there, only hours before.

Violence. And surprise. And struggle. An incredible one that ended in sordid defeat. The feeling made Will’s blood run cold, a thick shiver prickling down his back in the otherwise

oppressive heat of summer. The walls suddenly felt too close. He hurried back, bursting back into the main room as Jack motioned for Hannibal and Will to join him.

“Another letter was found. Plain sight. Laid out —"

“…like a greeting card,” Will interrupted, snatching the paper from Jack, with one gloved hand.

Dear Investigators,

I hope this note finds you well, and not too inconvenienced by my method of presentation. This is your Gardener, and I imagine that the fact that I knew something about him tells you something about me.

I do wish that you will allow me to continue my important work. My real goal is to find for you the most prolific killer you have not been able to apprehend, the Chesapeake Ripper himself. He certainly was my favorite topic of discussion.

As always, my regards to Will Graham.

“Forensics found no prints."

“Of course not,” Will muttered, scanning the page.

“Thoughts?” Jack sounded irritated, impatient.

He tipped his shoulder in quasi-indifference, much to Jack’s dismay, trying to maintain his outward composure over the rush of feelings at the revealing words. Will caught Hannibal’s gaze for the faction of a heartbeat before walking out of the house, screen door slamming behind him.

Jack watched Will go with a wince at the loud noise the door made.

"I suppose I need to ask you to go after him and make sure he's fit."

Hannibal waved his hand dismissively. "No need to ask. Will is my friend. This has been exceptionally hard on him, knowing he had a hand in providing this killer's education."

"I want him at the hospital when this man wakes up. Will needs to hear him describe the suspect. He's the only one who can make an ID."

"You're right, Jack. He will not only recall them from a description, but he will remember their demeanor. This will be our best hope to catch our killer."

Jack gazed around the room at the splintered furniture, some of which was quite old and well-built.

"I suppose if there's any consolation to be had, I don't think the Chesapeake Ripper would hold up against this one. Can't just chance them only killing him, though. Otherwise I'd just say we let him loose in the world for a while."

Hannibal smiled and nodded sagely at Jack's statement. "Quite right."

When he caught up to Will, he was standing at Hannibal's car with his hand on the door, as if he was deciding whether or not to just jump in and drive away.

He twitched, and then relaxed, when he felt Hannibal's hand on his shoulder.

"Will. You want to be alone." It was a statement, not a question.

"Yes. Please, take me to my car. I have to go home for a while. I...that is to say, we, need to decide what to do. I won't..."

Suddenly his voice broke. A moment ago, Will had sounded angry, the rage of the killer seeping into his blood. Now he had to reconcile that with a newfound fear.

"I believe you were about to say, 'I won't let him have you'."

Will nodded, looking away.

"Indeed, we will determine a necessary course of action. But not today."

Hannibal led Will around to the passenger side, and opened the door. Soon they were off in silence back to the BAU.

. . . . .

Once back, Will sat in his car, without turning it on, and watched Hannibal pull out of the lot. He slumped back in his seat, rubbing his eyes.

He swore under his breath at the dull headache that threatened to turn into something much worse. Hand shoved into his pocket, he fished out a nearly-empty bottle of aspirin. Realizing he had nothing to drink, he chewed through more tablets than he should have, wincing at the bitterness on his tongue.

The entire afternoon felt wrong, the world tipped on its axis in such a way that no matter which way Will turned to right himself, it was the wrong direction. With a shaking hand he started his car, intent on going home to fix himself more fingers of whiskey than he cared to admit.

The traffic was blissfully light, though it did little to quiet the turmoil that mounted inside. Will passed a clammy hand over his face, suddenly overheated. He fumbled with the air conditioner for a few moments before a blast of cold air finally came pouring out. Undoing the buttons of his shirt, Will yanked his collar open and took a shaky breath.

“It’s just a panic attack,” Will mumbled out loud, as if to dispel the fear that pulsed at the very edges of his awareness. But it was no good. His breath was too shallow, his heart too

fast. He jammed a hand into his pocket, fingers closing over his cell phone. Pulling it out, he managed to unlock it, intent on dialing Hannibal. But he lost his grip, and it flew out of his hand.

“Fuck!” Will swore loudly, hand pounding the steering wheel in a fit of barely-concealed rage.

He stole a moment from the road and looked down to find the cell. Another quick check and then he was reaching down to retrieve it, only to hit a bump in the asphalt. Will hissed, unbearably angry, when he felt it slide under the seat.

Except, that as Will sat up, he had the sudden and distinct feeling that the phone had been pulled away from him. A cold fear churned in his stomach, a nauseous mix of horror and fury. With a terrified glance in the review mirror, Will looked back to see a shadowy figure looming behind him.

He merged, not bothering with his signal light, nor the No U-Turn sign that loomed before him. A quick recalculation, a little change of plans, and then he was speeding off toward Hannibal’s home. It took every ounce of strength to keep the car on the road. Landmarks flew by as he drove, as shapeless and vague as the figure behind him.

Will knew, without a doubt, that it was the killer. While he had enough presence of mind to seek out Hannibal, his insight had dissolved to the point where he was unaware that his vehicle was inhabited by nothing more than a hallucination of his fevered mind.

The length of the trip had little meaning to Will as he pulled into Hannibal’s long driveway, coming to a stop near one of the back entrances. The shadowy figure dissolved before his testing eyes and Will grinned, suddenly confident with a new-found but irritable energy.

He bounded up the back steps, letting himself in without so much as knocking.

Hannibal was in his kitchen when he heard Will's car pull up; he recognized its distinctive engine noise. So when he heard the back door open, he was aware of who it was, but surprised by Will not coming to the front. It was entirely unlike him, so he was at least somewhat prepared for a departure from the usual. His instinct told him to go to his small emergency supply of sedatives located in the bathroom off the study, take a syringe to conceal in his apron pocket, and wait in the hallway between the sitting room and the stairs.

Although it hadn't been more than an hour since they were last together, the version of Will that stepped into his view was so different, it was as if Hannibal hadn't seen him in weeks.

"Will..."

His eyes were wide and unfocused, and his hair was disheveled, as if he'd been pulling at it. His shirt collar was stretched and a button had broken free.

"You didn't go home?" Hannibal asked. It was an obvious question, but one he hoped would bring Will into the present.

"Why should I," Will spat, "don't you want me here? I'm not good enough for you, am I? I know I'm not that smart, but I can kick *your* ass."

Will's voice was unrecognizable. Hannibal had never heard him dissociate to the point of seeming like a different person, but this was as close to it as he'd ever experienced. He sounded younger, crass.

"You aren't yourself, Will." Hannibal tried to reach out to hold his upper arm, but Will pulled away so violently, he smashed his hand into the wall. He seemed to think he'd been hit, and he jumped hard in the opposite direction, slamming his hip into the other side of the hallway. With a terrible suddenness, Will went from agitated to enraged, lunging forward directly at Hannibal's chest. They flew together several feet.

Once out in the more open area of the sitting room, Will spun backwards, knocking a glass decanter off a table. The crash distracted him long enough for Hannibal to get the syringe out of his pocket, and jab it into Will's thigh. He went down hard on one knee, and before the drug took hold, managed to growl out one phrase:

"I'll kill you for this."

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the updates taking longer. Probably every other week now until the end.

The blood meal thing is real, in case you were wondering!

nature's care
Organic
Blood Meal
a luscious way to feed your plants for bodacious blooms and vibrant color
NET WT/PESO NETO 3 LB (1.36 kg)

Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

> Will wakes up after Hannibal incapacitates him; Hannibal employs pleasurable techniques for restoring his senses.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will came to consciousness slowly.

Hannibal hovered close by, turning on his heel when he heard the other man attempting to move.

“You’re quite immobilized, I assure you. Though, judging by your pupil dilation, it appears some of the cocktail with which I’ve injected you has not completely begun to work. No matter, I’m quite sure it will only be a few more moments until it takes full effect."

Will blinked slowly, eyes still wild and disoriented despite his slowing physical responses.

With no less hatred than before, he snarled at Hannibal, tongue too thick in his mouth to have the intended effect.

“I’ll fuckin’ kill you,” he drawled, confused as to why he wasn’t able to make good on his threat.

“I highly doubt that."

Will shifted uncomfortably, for reasons he couldn’t quite grasp. He convulsed suddenly, trying desperately to free himself with his dwindling energy. Hannibal listened, fascinated, to the increasingly frantic breathing and watched as the slow realization was dawning on his rather captive patient. He was going nowhere.

With a sudden loss of muscle tone, Will’s head fell back against the ornate wooden chair he had been bound to. The loud crack of his skull on the solid surface startled him back to partial awareness and he blinked owlishly up at Hannibal.

He shook his head angrily, a thick line of saliva falling from his trembling lower lip.

“Untie me you asshole," he said, though it came out almost too garbled to understand.

Hannibal noticed, with growing satisfaction, that Will was nearly unintelligible as he tried to speak. He shifted again, groaning. There was a strange fullness in his body, the sensation

confusing and disorienting in his state.

“You did something to me,” he accused, baring his teeth.

"So I did," admitted Hannibal, "however you were about to attack me completely out of nowhere, so it's a matter of self defense. The other...things...are going to help bring you back to yourself."

Will suddenly understood part of that suggestive ellipsis, when he realized that there was a specific reason why he felt unusually stimulated.

"Something...is inside of me and...oh." He looked down and saw his cock becoming erect. He saw he was naked. It sharpened his senses just enough to speak more coherently.

"Tell me what you did."

"After I hit you with a dose of Haldol, you collapsed rather quickly. It is fast acting, and I stripped you to inspect you and ensure you had not injured yourself prior to your arrival. I injected you with a slow-release antipsychotic which should take effect over the next hour. So we have plenty of time."

Still stuck in the mind of the killer, Will reacted as he would. He wasn't aware, in that moment, of the depth of their relationship.

"Time for *what?*"

"To take advantage of the erectile dysfunction medication I gave you as well. When you return to your own personality, you will recall that sexual release has helped you many times before."

Will jerked in his bonds, hitting his head against the chair back again. Hannibal *tsked* and walked around to put a folded cloth over it to cushion the blows. He'd secure Will's head more fully in a few moments.

Will swallowed loudly as he slumped forward, an angry growl spilling from his lips.

“Your mouth may feel dry for a few moments, but it will pass quickly.” Hannibal paused when the prone man made a sound. He inferred the response easily enough. “Why? Just a side effect from the Valium, I assure you. To lessen your gag reflex for the duration of the evening."

“Go to hell!” Will growled again, but the threat lost its venom as Hannibal approached. He snarled a hand in the damp, tangled curls, pulling Will’s head sharply to the side. With his other hand he lifted one heavy eyelid, then the other, noting the widening pupils.

Will struggled angrily to free himself, twisting his head away with a pained noise.

Hannibal brought a glass of water to his lips, and he took a few sips; in his state, Will did not see that he was holding something behind his back. His head lolled back with the relief of the

water on his parched throat, and while he was momentarily distracted, Hannibal slipped a metal ring behind his teeth.

Will's eyes flew open, but it was too late. His jaw ached as he tried to flex it shut, but he soon gave up.

"Good," Hannibal said. "There's no resisting this. I assure you that once we are finished, you will be quite yourself again."

The ring in Will's mouth was attached to metal fingers and to straps that fastened behind his head. It also prevented him from injury. Hannibal stood back, pleased at seeing the small line of saliva beginning to trickle down Will's chin.

"Nearly finished," he said, pressing a warm kiss to Will's temple, and smoothing his hair off of his forehead.

Will responded by drooling on himself again, much to Hannibal’s amusement.

Hannibal could see confusion taking the place of the former rage. Though still disoriented, Will’s gaze was no longer wild. He sank further into his drugged state over the next several moments, as Hannibal gathered a few remaining items. By the time he returned, his rather captive patient was very much subdued. Clearly not back to himself, but no longer at the mercy of unseen phantoms, Will instead existed between those spaces.

With a sluggish tilt of his head, he tried to follow Hannibal’s movements as he approached. Something hung loosely in his hands, though Will was unable to process what it might be. A soft leather strap was laid across his shoulder, carefully slipped over his heated skin.

Will tried to shiver, but found he could not. Instead, he groaned quietly, while Hannibal pressed a gentle touch to his collarbones and chest, fingers trailing slowly through the perspiration that was already gathering.

Another item followed, this one laid across his bare thighs - a length of thick blue ribbon. Hannibal reached for the leather strap, but Will’s head dropped forward suddenly.

“You are right, Will, how terribly rude of me. Of course you would like to watch,” he said teasingly, reaching once more for the blue ribbon.

“Try to keep your eyes open for me."

Will's senses sharpened momentarily, his heart pounding. An injection of adrenaline from his fear response; being bound and not knowing what was to come next terrified him in this state.

Hannibal could see his pupils blown from anxiety, and he tried his best to calm him by stroking his hair. Once he saw his shoulders relax a little, he carried on.

"Doesn't it match your eyes? Quite beautiful. We will have to do this again when you are more cogent. Perhaps in front of a mirror so you can enjoy it properly."

He took the ribbon, silk and expensive, and looped it twice around the base of Will's cock. Nearly hard already, from so many mixed emotions, Hannibal stroked him until he was fully so. Then he twined the ends together, just over and under without a knot, and brought the longer end up, tight against the slit at the head. Back down to join the other end; then a series of simple crossings of the fabric, around and over at quarter-inch intervals. It had the effect of looking like a braid.

Finally he reached the sensitive part just underneath the flare of Will's cockhead. Here, he tied a tight knot. The silk was already starting to dampen where it pressed in at the slit.

Hannibal straightened his back and took in the entire picture.

"Words fail me." His voice was dark and full, yet quiet.

Will made a small noise at the statement.

His head hung loose on his shoulders and he watched with a strange, detached fascination. The feel of the ribbon was enough that it broke through some of the numbness of the sedation. Already his cock ached, the bite of the fabric making him aware of the fullness in his body.

The large plug moved inside him as he shifted minutely in the chair, the flared end pressing teasingly against his prostate. Breath, shallow in the drugged state, increased ever so slightly to Hannibal’s sensitive ears as Will tried to rock forward a bit. He tried to lift his head, whimpering when it became too difficult.

A few fingers found their way under his chin, and Hannibal tilted Will's head back. He stroked his face, slowly, thumb rubbing back and forth between the steel and leather. His cheek was warm; indeed, the whole of his body felt so alive under Hannibal’s touch that he permitted himself a moment to take it all in. He longed to touch Will’s lips, his tongue, to press his fingers inside him when no resistance could be given.

But that would have to wait a moment.

“You mustn’t hit your head again, Will…” Hannibal trailed off quietly as picked up the soft length of leather. “I've something to help you, to keep it just at the right angle."

Tilting Will's head up very slightly, Hannibal fastened the strap just under his chin. Now, he could no longer watch his own cock, which was a pity; but the necessity of this positioning took precedence.

Will could still see Hannibal however, and he took advantage of the direct line of sight to begin to remove his garments. Will's eyes tracked him as he took off one piece of clothing after another. When Hannibal took off his tie, Will paid close attention. *Perhaps something about that reminded him of past experiences together,* Hannibal thought.

Finally, Hannibal stood fully naked in front of Will's searching gaze. He made a point to lightly stroke himself, and Will's breath hitched audibly. He was definitely remembering.

"Breathe slowly, Will. I'm going to touch you now. It will feel very good."

When Hannibal's hand first made contact with Will's bound cock, he jumped in his bonds at first. But Hannibal's hands were so so warm and skilled, that he relaxed quickly. It *did* feel exceptionally good...the ache transformed into a sense of desperation for release. The plug pressed deeper inside and everything converged into a singular point of need.

In the heightened, confused state, Will was unable to temper any of his responses. He cried out, anguished. Had Hannibal not felt his cock straining, nor seen the thick beads of pre-cum dampening the ribbon, he would have imaged a much different scenario precipitating those noises that fell from Will's open mouth.

Will struggled to make sense of the moment - the touch and the measured tones of the man before him felt so familiar.

Hannibal stroked him once more, large hand wrapped fully around the aching length.

He straightened up then, and watched Will's expression - eyes half closed, sweat clung to his tangled fringe. He panted, helplessly, trying to slow his breathing and cool his overheated skin. Hannibal slid his fingers up, a brief touch against the swollen head of Will's cock before he laid a hand against his chest.

One of the ingredients in the erectile dysfunction medication had the odd side-effect of causing severe flushing. Already prone to it, Will was left with deep stripes of color across each cheek. The blush curled down over his neck, across his shoulders, even flushing dark and alluring over his chest. It was here that Hannibal touched him, swiping a thumb over the red-stained skin, until he came to one sensitive nipple. With a teasing motion, Hannibal circled in on the flesh beneath this fingers, until Will was writhing and moaning once more.

By now, Hannibal's own cock was leaking. Slowly, he slid the head along Will's tongue, so easily accessible, his mouth completely open because of the wide spider gag.

"Mmmmm....Will...your mouth is so hot. I wish you could feel how spectacularly wonderful this is. I plan on taking full advantage of you in this state."

He entered his mouth further, gradually so as not to overwhelm Will. The back of his throat was hotter still, and Hannibal had to struggle to not forget himself. He withdrew and ran his cock along the slick line of Will's lips. His eyes were wide, but more comprehending then they had been before. Being the vessel of Hannibal's pleasure was bringing back his self awareness.

It took him a while to realize he couldn't actually close his mouth; when he did, he relaxed a little more. Taking away his control made it easier to accept the situation.

Hannibal carried on this way for an amount of time that, for Will, became difficult to determine. Using his mouth, teasing his cock through the silken bonds...the anticipation and feeling of fullness built.

He tried to make some kind of noise as he grew more stimulated. Hannibal smiled when he heard his frustrated sounds.

"It won't be long now. I'm so close. Would you enjoy tasting me even more?"

Will tried to nod, but a distressed whimper fell from his lips when he remembered he could not.

It was so difficult to reason in this state. Will rocked his hips, as much as the bindings allowed, to indicate how very much he wanted to taste Hannibal. Awareness had settled solely on his body; it was too much effort in his drugged state to think, to plan, to anticipate what might happen in these next few moments.

His eyelids drooped for a second; it was becoming increasingly difficult to keep them open, despite the adrenaline simmering in his veins. There was a profound sense of disconnection each time he lost sight of the man before him. A few stray tears slipped down Will’s ruddy cheeks from the strain of keeping his gaze locked on Hannibal.

The figure loomed in front of him for a moment, before brushing away the wetness that gathered at the corners of Will’s eyes. He made a soothing sound, but Will was beyond that. He struggled forward the few inches he was afforded, rocking back and forth on the plug buried so deeply inside him. The motion and intense pressure brought forth a surge precum, soaking the ribbon before it tumbled down his swollen, aching cockhead.

Will pushed his tongue against the metal ring between his teeth, wanting nothing more than to savor the man before him.

There was nothing else in his mind save for this immediate need. Even his own state, of needing to cum very badly, fled his consciousness for the time being. He didn't have long to wait. Hannibal tightened his fingers through the hair wound around them, so soft to the touch. He pressed in hard against Will's tongue, and came hard down his open throat.

Will somehow remembered to breathe through his nose; that familiar technique finally brought him fully back to himself. He assessed his situation; Hannibal had just cum in his mouth; he had a large device in his ass; and he was completely bound, including tightly around his cock. When Hannibal finished and withdrew, he could feel a stream of cum flowing down his chin; Will realized his mouth was strapped open. He moaned at this, as the feeling of complete vulnerability washed over him.

Panting, Hannibal trailed his fingers through the mess at Will's mouth, down his neck.

"You should see yourself, Will. Even if your mouth wasn't held open, you'd still be so eager. I can see it in your eyes, in the flush of your skin. You needed this so desperately. We have a few more things to get through before I can free you."

Hannibal picked up a small remote from the table near them, and switched it on. Will jerked hard in his ropes when he felt the plug inside of him begin to vibrate directly on his prostate. A whine escaped his lips, and he began to breathe quickly.

"Perfect," he whispered, awed at how fast the device had the desired effect. Will's cock was even wetter. He'd likely cum instantly if his length wasn't so tightly bound. Hannibal turned up the power on the pulsing thing, eased off again. Will was shaking like he might fly apart after only five or so minutes of this.

Finally, Hannibal turned it down to almost its lowest setting. He left it on while he untied the straps behind Will's head, and removed the spider gag.

Will was close to hyperventilating, but Hannibal wanted to hear every sound he made unencumbered.

The knot at the top of Will's cock held the entire ribbon together. It was soaked; the whole ribbon was a deeper blue because of all the slickness that had leaked. Hannibal grasped the ends of the knot firmly, and pulled. The intricate ropework up and down the length of his cock came apart, and, now freed. Will began to cum. He wailed and threw his head back, hard breaths coming in between the animalistic sounds that seemed like they were ripped directly from the bottom of his diaphragm. His abdomen and chest heaved.

When the great torrents ceased, he turned off the vibrating. Will's head collapsed on his chest; he was a canvas of saliva and semen. Even Hannibal was astonished; he never could have imagined it would have looked so exquisitely beautiful.

Hannibal let him recover his breath before attempting to move him. Will was quite unconscious.

His respirations decreased slowly to Hannibal’s clinical eye and ear, until finally he slipped back into deep sedation. A gentle touch against Will’s temple -one of the few clean places on his body, Hannibal smirked- brought forth a small noise.

“Dreaming already, Will?” Hannibal bent and touched his lips to the prone man’s forehead, watching his eyes track slowly beneath heavy lids.

I am surrounded. Engulfed. By the thought of you, the sight of you, the feeling of your body against mine. How is it that we find each other? Amidst an almost infinite sea of others, how have we come together like this?

Your searching hands part my thighs, my body only too willing to fall open to your touch. I yield to you, holding your gaze as you descend upon me.

I would give you everything. My body. My mind. My burning desire for you.

I would never deny you.

Hannibal worked quickly to loosen all the ropes that held Will to the chair. He wanted to have him untied, laid out in bed, and cleaned off before he woke up.

The bonds came free, and he brought his arms under Will's knees and shoulders, and carried him the few steps to the bed. He'd prepared it with a layer of thick towels to lay him on, knowing Will would be quite a mess by now. He made sure Will was comfortable with

pillows under his head and hips before retrieving warm, wet cloths to clean him with. Starting at his neck, Hannibal worked his way down, cleansing Will of everything.

He reached his thighs, and braced Will's feet flat on the bed to finally remove the object inside of him. Will stirred then; it was quite large, after all. Hannibal removed all traces of lubricant, and admired the view. Will was relaxed and open in this state, still effected by the drugs he'd given him. He couldn't resist running a few fingers over his sensitive, pink hole.

Initially, Hannibal hadn't planned to do anything more to Will this evening, but seeing him like this, vulnerable and waiting to be touched and tasted, more ideas occurred to him.

Chapter End Notes

Once again, thanks for sticking with our slower updates...life is kicking our asses right now, but our fun will not be denied for long!

Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

After Will's episode, Hannibal is not quite ready to let him sleep just yet.

For the second time that evening, Will lay unconscious in Hannibal’s bed.

Wakefulness came more slowly this time with the backdrop of adrenaline gone, replaced instead with a bone-deep exhaustion. Eyelids still heavy and only half open, Will was not yet fully aware, but neither completely submersed in darkness. Hannibal listened to the soft sounds falling from his lips, watched as he tried and failed to move.

Weak and confused, Will fell back into the pillows and called out quietly, mumbling Hannibal’s name.

Hannibal knelt between Will's knees, and rested his head against the side of one of them.

"I am right here, Will. I am not going to leave you in this state."

He continued stroking him, up and down the cleft of his ass; he didn't want to permit Will to fall asleep when he was just starting to achieve the reassertion of his normal consciousness. The fact that Will was able to say Hannibal's name was a positive sign, a progression he wanted to maintain.

In addition to this altruistic reason, Hannibal was intrigued by how relaxed Will was, everywhere. He'd not given him a cocktail of drugs like this before, nor had him keep such a large plug inside of him while he was under their influence. He pressed a finger into him, curious. The resistance was definitely lessened; he still felt invitingly hot and tight, but it was so much easier to initiate penetration.

"I'm going to continue touching you," he said quietly. "When you can, tell me how you feel."

Will tried to comply, but the thought seemed to drift from him mind before he could even process it. *Had he been injured? Was he ill?*

His own thoughts were too distant to hold onto and so he lay for several moments, unmoving, until finally a glimmer of sensation broke through the haze.

“Warm. I feel warm.” Will groaned and tried to lift his head, but it was too much effort. “I feel strange, Hannibal. What’s wrong with me?” He slurred slightly, brow furrowed in confusion.

"Nothing is wrong, Will. Not anymore. We'll discuss the events that brought you to my bed like this at another time. For now, it is best if you concentrate on your body. What you are feeling. You won't be able to think clearly for some time."

To further focus him, and also to satisfy his own curiosity, Hannibal leaned in between Will's parted thighs, his legs arranged lazily, uselessly weak. He trailed his tongue along the soft, vulnerable skin. Will was flushed, blood rushing through his dilated vessels. The scent of his sweat was not acrid with fear; his wandering mind had not made him afraid, merely lost.

Hannibal moved his mouth along and up, lips now hot on Will's perineum. He was pleased to hear a moan of pleasure rather than the strained noises he'd been making before. He found his tongue met just as little resistance as his fingers had as it slid into the heat of Will's body.

The press of Hannibal's tongue brought a shiver through his fatigued limbs. There was no energy to arch his back, to move closer or cry out for more. Instead, Will merely tried to move his head and seek out the source of his pleasure.

He felt the stutter of his heart again, a little uptick in its former sluggish beat. Hannibal slid inside again, one of his strong hands trailing along the warm skin of Will's inner thigh. Just a little pressure, and a pleased muffled noise from Hannibal, and Will's legs were falling open before him.

Will tried to lift his head and focus his wavering gaze.

"Hannibal?" He mumbled, sighing from the effort of speech. "Where are you?"

Hannibal moved back, and took in the sight of Will. He'd had his pleasure earlier with his mouth, but seeing him reclining, open, receptive...it was too much for him not to indulge in further. He'd have to be gentle.

In response to Will's query, Hannibal probed at Will's entrance with the head of his cock. "Right here, preparing to take you again."

There was no resistance as he savored the feeling of his cockhead easily slipping inside. There was a heat that he met, which, even for Will, was unusually intense. Hannibal couldn't suppress a deep moan as he penetrated that tight-yet-lax ring of muscle over and over.

The sensation of being penetrated by that hard length felt both strange and familiar, as if Will's entire awareness had settled on that one place in his body.

He couldn't suppress a weak cry when his thighs were pressed even farther apart, Hannibal's thickness opening him so easily. It seemed an age before Will was finally able to turn his head. He watched the man above him, moving in a slow rhythm, as if in a dream.

Hannibal's words floated through his fuzzy mind:

"...take you again."

Will tried to make sense of it, but the thought left his mind, just as the breath was leaving his body from Hannibal's thrusts.

Hannibal was fascinated by how it appeared to him, and made soft, pleased noises.

"I am enjoying how open you are for me right now, Will. Quite lovely to watch."

“I don’t understand.”

The sensation felt incredibly strange to Will - there was no resistance as Hannibal entered him, the entire experience quite confusing.

Will attempted to lift his arms and found nothing was working quite right. He tried to curl his fingers toward Hannibal instead, to touch him.

Understanding that Will was still confused, he attempted to explain why he felt so strange.

"You are so open because you had a rather large plug inside of you for an extended period of time. Which was necessary to put the maximum amount of pressure against your prostate. Like this..." At this point, Hannibal slid in further, demonstrating what he meant.

Will's head fell back the little he was able to raise it, unable to hold it up. He started to focus to a small degree on what was happening - that it felt like he’d already cum, that something had already been done to him. Many small, quiet noises fell from his lips as Hannibal started pressing against his prostate; Will was starting to feel the beginnings of overstimulation.

He had never quite lost his erection from before, and now was returning in full, and Hannibal of course noticed.

"I think you'll be ready again very soon."

He continued shallowly fucking him, all the thickness of him focused just a few inches deep in Will's body.

Will made a concerned noise, despite feeling pleasure from what Hannibal was doing. There was a little fear creeping into his awareness, though mostly dampened by the drugs.

“Ready for what?” he mumbled, almost incoherently

Hannibal slowed down, focusing his efforts into making Will aroused again, just with his cock. He hadn't touched Will, except with his mouth.

He answered: "Ready to cum again. I want to feel you, from inside of you. I think you can do that for me. I think you want to."

Will lay quietly. It seemed an indeterminate about of time as he listened to the sound of his own breathing, loud and discordant to his ears. Thoughts slipped by, unexamined, before his unsettled mind. He felt the low hum of fear in the background of his awareness.

The thought of cumming again seemed almost unbearable.

“Please, I can’t."

"Calm yourself, Will. Just listen to my voice, and feel me moving inside of you. Think of how desperately you want to please me. That is so much a part of you. Think of what brought you here to me tonight. You trust me, instinctively, even when your conscious mind is on fire." Hannibal continued to rock into Will, opening him gently by degrees.

Will found he couldn't respond. Incapable of speech, at least for the moment, he rested passively. The only awareness was the feeling of the short, careful thrusts and the sensation of diminishing resistance. His head lolled to the side from the movement. Will's gaze settled on the chair that, only a short time ago, he had been secured to.

Hannibal heard a fearful whimper from the man beneath him.

"Please, help me…" Will mumbled, frightened despite the slow warmth of pleasure spreading through his body.

Hannibal slowed, then stopped. Very gradually, he pulled all the way out of Will, massaging the backs of his thighs. The touching became more purposeful, and he soon had Will turned on his side away from the chair. He felt the tension in Will's arms begin to fade as he lay on his side. Hannibal moved in behind him, one arm underneath, and stroking Will's chest over his heart.

"Be still. We have all the time we need to help you." He started raising up Will's leg, bending his knee so his foot was braced on the bed.

Will did begin to calm finally, the contact from Hannibal and the new position helping. The drugs were enough that the former fear began to fade, the image of the chair and the memories of what took place drifting out of his awareness. Will leaned heavily back into Hannibal's arm, head resting against him as was so easily moved and positioned.

"What will you do to me?"

Will's eyes fell closed, too difficult to keep them open any longer.

Hannibal entered him again, holding his leg up more purposefully. He sank in all the way this time, firmly, eliciting a gasp from Will.

"I will do what I so often do, Will. Use you as an instrument for my pleasure. You would not resist, even if you were able to."

Will groaned at Hannibal's words. He tried to focus through the haze on the different sensations, and realized he was somewhat hard, despite himself.

"I could never resist you."

To Hannibal's delight, Will tried to move a hand toward his cock, but was unable to quite make it there.

Knowing that Will wouldn't be able to masturbate himself, Hannibal put a warm, broad hand on Will's cock. He felt it respond to both the touch, and the long firm strokes of Hannibal

inside of him. The position was best for deep penetration, and Hannibal was not pulling out all the way.

"The effects of the drugs I had to give you earlier have not completely dissipated. You will not be coordinated enough to bring yourself to orgasm."

Still very clearly affected by the drugs, Will couldn't even thrust into Hannibal's hand. The contact felt amazing though, even through the veil of the various substances in his body.

"You feel good…"

The rest of his words were lost behind a soft moan.

Hannibal thrust deeper, and he matched the speed and intensity to stroking Will's cock. The timing of movements was expertly coordinated.

"You feel hot, and tight, and pliant. Ready to be filled, and bruised, and tasted, and fucked. So sweet is your obedience, so readily given. This is what you are made for."

Despite his ecstasy, Hannibal's movements were coordinated. Fluid. Each thrust, each press of his fingers brought Will closer to the limits of his body and mind. It was too much pleasure all at once. In his weakened, vulnerable state there was no way to process what was happening, so Will fell back on the one constant his fevered mind could grasp:

"Use me," he groaned. Hannibal could hear his troubled breathing, even in those short words, as he worked to regulate the frantic rise and fall of his chest. Seeking out something solid, Will tried to lift a hand to touch him.

The fact that Will even attempted to make contact was a very encouraging sign to Hannibal. Physically and mentally it was important to keep him anchored in the moment. Hannibal leant down, tongue hot and teasing against Will's earlobe. He spoke directly to him, in hushed and deliberate tones:

"I intend to use you. And not just now, but at any time I wish to. If you were awoken with my cock at your lips, your first thought would be to open your mouth and suck."

The words washed over Will. The drugs, weaving the way through his limbs had already left him pliant and lax, but Hannibal's utterance ushered in a new level of submission. Will gave up the last of his conscious control, relaxing back against Hannibal. When his own words failed, he let his head fall to the side, the long line of his neck exposed.

The act had its intended effect: Hannibal wouldn't deny himself to opportunity to suck and bite at Will's throbbing pulse. He closed his teeth over the soft flesh, unbearably hot and alive under his lips. A thick pulse of precum dampened Hannibal's fingers as he bit down, his grip tightening around Will's straining length.

He thrust harder, drawing a breathless moan from the man beneath him.

"You're so wet already. You know what I want from you."

Will shook his head sluggishly, crying out in pleasured agony when he felt sharp teeth at the curve of his throat.

“Tell me what you want. Anything, please.” Will tried and failed to push into Hannibal’s fist.

"I want you to cum for me. I want to feel you pulsing around me as I drive into you."

Will tried desperately to coordinate his movements - to lift his hips, arch his back, but it was no use. He sank once more into Hannibal’s arms.

“Faster, please,” he whispered, voice hoarse.

"You take me so perfectly," Hannibal sighed.

He had begun to feel like he was getting close himself; wanting to time things so Will's orgasm sets his off. He thrust just a bit more shallowly, tilting his hips to maximize the contact with Will's prostate, and focused the attention of his hand just under the head of Will's cock. With shorter, direct motions, he stroked him where he knew Will was most sensitive.

A series of quiet sobs and moans reached Hannibal’s ears, the increased attention causing Will to be even more vocal. He thought about nothing besides Hannibal using him, touching him whenever he wants to; it made Will eager to please him. He tried to tighten his muscles, despite not really being able to.

Feeling uncoordinated, his rhythm was completely off, but Hannibal’s movements compensated for it. Will’s was terribly close, lax and yielding in Hannibal’s arms.

Abruptly, he began to cum, with no real control over his orgasm, spilling with a cry over Hannibal’s fingers.

"You're so good for me Will," Hannibal said in a dark, but somehow dreamy voice.

He closed his eyes, momentarily thinking of how difficult this must have been for Will, yet he managed to do it anyway. He resumed his deep, hard thrusts, feeling the orgasm course through Will, inside and out. He let himself go, giving over to this extraordinary experience, releasing deep within Will's shaking body.

Even the slew of drugs weaving their wave through his veins couldn’t keep Will’s expressiveness completely contained. He felt so much; ached in a way that only Hannibal could satisfy, in both body and mind. There was the sensation of being held, and, *ah,* Will shivered at the mere thought of it, *of being filled so perfectly.* He tried to push back, to meet Hannibal even as he still thrust inside him, but his body would not behave.

Will relished the feeling anyway - even if his body failed him - of being stretched, and fucked, and filled.

Hannibal's orgasm was very long, drawn out, and satisfying for him; he could feel Will trying desperately to move but failing. That he would have the instinct to even try, despite being totally unable to...it moved him to the verge of tears. He was acutely aware of how

incapacitated Will really was. He knew the depth of what he'd been through that day, the intensity of the drugs' effects. But yet he still tried to give himself over with conscious intent.

He stopped stroking Will's cock, delivering a few last, quick, hard thrusts before stilling. Will's heart pounded beneath his fingers, hand still over it. Hannibal held Will close, caressing him.

"You did so well. Your instinct to please me is so incredibly beautiful." He kisses the bruised spots on Will's neck where there are some teeth marks rising.

It was no use to attempt to temper his responses, Will was too caught up in the moment. A few breathless sobs, stray tears down hot, flushed cheeks, and he was falling limp and exhausted into Hannibal’s arms. A steady, strong hand moved over his chest, thumbing rubbing deliberately over his pounding heart. It was impossible not to sink into that touch, into the feeling of complete surrender. Full lips pressed gently to this bruised skin as a soothing whisper found its way to his ears.

Hannibal slowly ran his other hand across Will’s ribcage, down to the swell of his abdomen, finally feeling his breathing beginning to regulate. He pressed a few more kisses to his neck and rested his head against the back of Will’s. He was intoxicating like this. Hannibal breathed in, taking in the scent of his arousal, his sweat, and his hair, damp against the nape of his neck.

"It's time for you to rest now. You did so well. Better than I could have dared to imagine. I will remember, and you will be so rewarded."

Hannibal smiled when he heard a soft noise from Will, barely loud enough to hear, despite the silent room. The permission and freedom to let go washed over him, along with the last slivers of consciousness. Will slipped away easily, suspended in darkness and the feeling of Hannibal’s body wrapped around his own.

. . . . .

They dozed together for a time; Hannibal eventually got up and cleaned them up well enough to sleep, before getting back into bed and sleeping until morning.

Will woke to Hannibal propped up on one elbow, watching him. He'd come out of his repose slowly, as if wheels turned in his mind.

"How long have you been doing that?" he asked sleepily. He felt like he'd slept deeply and could more or less remember everything that had happened the night and day before.

Hannibal smiled and said, "Long enough to make sure not to disturb you until you woke on your own."

He stroked Will's cheek.

"Hannibal...we have so much to talk about. This case. It's worse than I could have imagined. But I think I've worked a few things out."

"While you were sleeping? That is remarkable."

"Lots of things are clear to me now."

He put his hand over Hannibal's. It was his turn to smile.

Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

> Will and Hannibal come to a realization about their relationship, and decide on a course of action.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

While Will showered, Hannibal made coffee and toast, foregoing a true meal, and sent a message to Jack to not disturb Will until he contacted Crawford first, explaining they were having a morning session that could last a few hours.

Once Will had joined him, eating slowly, neither of them spoke. They retired to a couch in the sitting room where Will put his head on Hannibal's shoulder and eventually let out a long sigh before speaking.

"I said I'd try to kill you. It felt like I wanted to."

Hannibal stroked his still-damp hair.

"The extent of your rage last night was only an indication of how deeply you have fallen into the killer's mind. And your closeness to him is a reflection of your need to understand him, in order to protect me."

"Yes. But...I can't feel like that, towards you. It makes me want to tear out my own heart."

"You said you had realized something."

“There are two killers.” Will said it simply, but with a measure of confidence that Hannibal heard quite clearly.

“You are quite sure of this.” It wasn’t a veiled question or dismissal, and Will nodded at Hannibal’s statement.

“I wasn’t sure at first, of course. Since the beginning though, something hasn’t fit. Been off in a way I couldn’t,” he paused, fingers curling over Hannibal’s thigh, “couldn’t quite grasp."

Hannibal said nothing, as he often did when waiting for Will to put the images in his mind into words.

“There was always something odd about it. I couldn’t put my finger on it. The disparity between the methods of-of…” Will stuttered faintly, a barrage of images coming forth of the

victim’s deaths. He looked up suddenly, catching Hannibal’s gaze.

“The letters were very precise. Methodical in some manner. They had a meter to them, when I read them. Like a calling card.” Will made a face, but continued.

“The bodies? They lacked the meter, or rather, they had a different one altogether. The bodies were there, part of the overall vision, but they arrived there by other means. There is someone orchestrating the murders. Planning them. Designing them. Using my methods of investigation as a backdrop for their own. And there’s another. Another person carrying out those plans."

Hannibal watched him keenly, fascinated as the logic of Will’s deductions unfurled before his eyes.

“Whoever is behind the planning, they’re incapable of carrying out the physical portion. They need someone else to do the dirty work."

Will trailed off. Visibly distressed, he was unable to meet Hannibal’s eyes.

“I won’t let them have you."

Hannibal took Will's hand in his own, and let the silence spread between them for a few moments before speaking.

"This couple. How did they meet?"

The questioned renewed Will's focus.

"Definitely at the Academy. There's been a very successful program there, hiring low-level felons for the maintenance program. Very low failure rate, but there's always a few that just disappear. One dropping out of the program wouldn't be seen as strange. If she - and I believe the mastermind is a she - found one that had a history of violence, something like bar fights, nothing with weapons - and befriended him...."

"Not seduced?" Hannibal asked.

"No. This killer, a big guy, would be too intimidated by her intelligence. No family. The connection wouldn't be sexual, more mistress and servant. He's convinced he's worthless, and she's the only one who has ever given him purpose."

"So," Hannibal continued, "they are not in love. I believe that gives us an advantage. If they were in love, they would stop at nothing to preserve the life of the other. Their motives are self-serving, whereas ours are selfless."

A realization crept through Will's mind. What Hannibal was saying...they'd never voiced it, never come close. Even before, when they had killed together to save each other's lives, he knew there was a name for their bond. Granted, it did not take the typical form, but there was no other word for it.

“I thought of us. Hannibal. That’s how I knew,” Will said quietly. His brow furrowed, as he tried to put it to words. “We’re the same, you and I, at the heart of it all. They are not. They’re discordant. Their ‘meter,’ whatever it is, it comes together by happenstance. Ours is different. Intentional. I…"

Will thought of the things he had done, and would do again, to save Hannibal’s life. Unspeakable things. But he would do them again in an instant.

Another long but comfortable silence stretched between them. Hannibal saw Will’s gaze, lost in the late morning sun, as the light streamed through the windows. He moved closer, instinctively, pressing up against Hannibal until he could feel the warmth from their bodies, even through layers of clothing.

He clutched Hannibal’s hand, tightly in his own, and thought of how it would grieve him, terribly, if he were not there beside him. The mere image of it made his chest ache. But then he felt the slow and rise and fall of Hannibal’s measured breaths, and Will's heart was full at the sight of him.

“Ours is different,” Will repeated softly, “because I love you,” he said simply, but with a quiet, fierce determination that underscored his words.

Hannibal squeezed Will's hand back at these words; he'd found he had been holding his breath as Will had been talking. He exhaled slowly and found his voice minutely, uncharacteristically, wavered as he spoke.

"We have another difference, Will. We were both alone without each other, but we were alone out of choice, not fate. Either one of us could have chosen any number of companions along the paths of our lives before ours converged. But we chose to be alone. I do not think that it was out of waiting for the other to come along. We would have been content to travel to our ends on a singular journey. Yet here we are."

Will looked at him, deep and profound understanding shining in his eyes.

Hannibal smiled, and moved his free hand to touch Will's cheek. He drew him in, and kissed his forehead, the side of his jaw, his lips.

"'Love' seems a thoroughly inadequate word to express our bond," Hannibal continued softly, "but it is all we have. I love you. And no power on this earth will tear us asunder. Do you believe my commitment to this pledge?"

He moved Will's hand to cover his heart.

"For all the remaining time that blood and breath flow through my body, I will protect you as you protect me."

“I believe you, Hannibal.” Will said quietly, trembling slightly as he listened. “Always.”

He watched, as if the world had slowed to a singular point in time, when Hannibal took hold of his hand.

The touch of his fingertips to Hannibal’s chest felt like the first time they had ever embraced. The feeling of newness, of the endless possibility, washed over him as real as the steady beat of Hannibal’s heart that pulsed beneath his hand.

Sinking into the embrace so easily, his body fit perfectly against the curve of Hannibal’s side. Will was enfolded as Hannibal brought his arms around him. He was whole, complete, in a way that was beyond his ability to describe.

Hannibal smiled at the quiet noise he made in an attempt to speak.

Will realized a deep ache to touch him, skin to skin, and tugged the back of his shirt free. He was warm. Alive. Will rubbed a thumb over the strong muscles, memorizing the way they felt beneath his hands.

Locked in their shared embrace, Will rested his against Hannibal’s shoulder, sighing deeply.

"Will...there is only one way we can get ahead of this situation. I believe you know what I am going to suggest."

"I do," said Will, a familiar tone of trepidation creeping into his voice, "and I wish you wouldn't. But I can't see any other way either."

"I must put myself out there as bait. The Chesapeake Ripper must display new victims. It will lure these two out, and they will make a mistake. I will not."

"But how can we make it so that the 'Ripper' finds out he's being targeted, without suspicion falling on you or me?" Will asked.

Hannibal adjusted his shoulders, unfortunately dislodging Will from his comfortable position. They both sat up as he retrieved his iPad from the bedside table.

After a moment of looking at it, he said, "Just as I suspected. Look."

Will glared in disbelief at the tattlecrime.com headline:

RIPPER BECOMES THE PREY AS NEW KILLERS TARGET THE MONSTER

"How...?"

Hannibal tried to suppress a quiet laugh. "Ms. Lounds' resourcefulness and lack of propriety may eventually be her downfall, but for now, it may be the key to our salvation."

"So," Will said, "'he' takes the challenge, and falls for the trap. But neither the pair who are hunting you nor the FBI are counting on one particularly devoted ace up the Ripper's very well-tailored sleeve."

Hannibal held Will close, and their promise to each other resonated in the embrace.

It was several days after that when Jack called Will to his office.

Will had returned home, to tend to his own affairs, while the plans were set in motion on Hannibal's side of things. He answered his cell, juggling his bag and barely managing to avoid dropping everything as he brought the phone to his ear.

"It's the Chesapeake Ripper, Will."

There was annoyance in his voice, and the faint sound in the background of shuffling papers. Will imagined him to be fumbling for a pen, taking notes while he was talking. Just what Jack needed, Will thought, another serial killer to deal with.

"It's not surprising, is it Jack?"

"Tattlecrime. The headline—"

"'Ripper becomes prey,' wasn't it?" Will interrupted. "Lounds was always shit at titles…" He muttered under his breath, picking up his keys from the counter and going outside.

"I'll need you in here. Now. I've already called for Hannibal."

"I'm on my way." Will gave a last minute check over his shoulder, absently counting dogs to make sure they were all inside.

"Who was it, Jack?"

There was a slight pause on the other end of the line.

"A cop. He killed a cop."

"Son of a bitch," Will swore softly, torn between a half smile and a grimace.

"Just get in here. You'll need to see this for yourself."

He hung up, leaving Will momentarily motionless on his front porch. He locked the door and started toward his car, tossing his items in back before sliding into his seat.

There was a method, a reason, of course, for who he had chosen.

Will's mind swam with images and thoughts as he sat for a few moments. He knew, instinctively, that the victim would be displayed in a way that highlighted the Ripper's intended message. He had an idea, he just needed to see the body to confirm and, as he always would, guide whatever trail that existed away from Hannibal.

By design, they hadn't spoken of the specifics; it would be enough for Will to pick off threads and lead them subtly astray. He sped away then, shaking himself out of his daydreams, hoping to catch Hannibal for a few minutes before meeting Jack.

Sure enough, Hannibal's car was at the crime scene, and Jack's was not yet there. Will was sure he'd know to hurry. Hannibal was standing back from the perimeter of the property

where the tape was up, and waiting for him.

"Will. I suspect we have few moments before Jack Crawford arrives. Tell me, what is the best course of action?"

Will looked in his eyes for a moment, catching a brief glimpse of the killer behind the professional facade Hannibal was fixing on himself for the occasion. He set the same demeanor on his own face.

"Stay behind me, off to the side. Try to read my expressions without looking like you're concentrating on me too much. When I do this-" Will clenched his fist at his side two times in quick succession- "ask me something about what I've just said."

Hannibal nodded, and just then, Jack's car pulled up to the property.

"You know what this is?" he asked striding up to them. "This is a nightmare. We have a worst case scenario on our hands here. A feud between the Ripper and this new one, involving tattlecrime and a dirty cop."

"The perfect storm," Hannibal said calmly.

"His house, I'm guessing?" Will asked.

"Yes. Come on, they're waiting for us in there. We have to stop this before it escalates any more."

Once inside, they encountered Zeller looking at the cop's computer, Price beginning to bag up a large pile of blood-soaked paper money, and Katz using a probe to push aside the cop's tongue, which was hanging too far out of his mouth than it ought to be able to do.

"You're just in time," Beverly said, "I'm almost...there..." With that, she extracted a wad of rolled up bills from the place deep in his throat where they'd been lodged.

Just as she did, a burst of compressed air followed, blood spraying all over her face shield, and making a noise that literally sounded like the dead man's last gasp.

"The Ripper wanted us to hear that," Will said. "He must have pumped some air into the lungs before stopping up the throat."

Price came over, having finished bagging the large quantity of bloody money from the floor, and said, "That was the least of what he had here. There must've been twenty thousand dollars in tens and twenties here. Going back five years at least, looking at the dates on the bills and taking into account the rate at things are taken out of circulation."

Will walked over to the computer Zeller was examining.

"There's a password protected spreadsheet here, well it was protected, not very well. Various amounts and dates, with names of cases, some of which I recognize as being high profile murders. The last entry is the recent death of the last victim in our case."

"Why keep track? Why have a possibly incriminating record to find?" Jack asked.

Will answered: "If he was selling information to Freddie Lounds, and something went bad, like he got caught, he could take her down with him. She probably knew about this, and made sure to keep him from getting discovered."

"But the Ripper found him," Jack said.

Will made a noise, nodding in agreement. Despite knowing who did this, who was responsible for the carnage laid out in front of them, Will still felt the pull of seeing how it happened.

“Tell me what you see, Will.” Jack stared him down at him, waiting.

Will slipped his glasses off, rubbing his eyes, before closing them briefly. He took a slow breath then looked around the room carefully.

“Came in through the back. The Ripper had been here before, briefly, middle of the night. Just a few hours before the murder. Tampered with the lock obviously."

Will walked to the middle of the room, looking around.

“Needed to catch him off guard. The Ripper’s not a large man. Not weak, but on the slow side. Hands aren’t very precise; he used to be steady in the old days, but he’s slipping now with age, he has to make up for it after the fact. Especially against a cop. The victim would have to be incapacitated before he started."

Needing to keep his wits about him, and not sink so deeply into the recreation that he failed to signal Hannibal, Will let his consciousness reassert itself more than he normally would. Even to Jack’s trained eye, he saw no change, but to Hannibal, it was noticeable. Will’s breathing resumed a more normal state, and small amount of color came back to his cheeks.

“Started with a blow to the back of the head. Enough that he was out of it, at least long enough to tie him up.” Will knelt down, one gloved hand following an erratic blood trail.

“Blood money,” he mumbled, momentarily distracted. But he shook himself and looked down at where the body was found. In his mind’s eye he saw the Ripper, large and looming, easily bring the officer to his knees with a single, swift blow. Nothing like what’s he’d described to mislead Jack. A large roll of bills was brutally thrust into his mouth.

Will watched, eyes wide, as the Ripper’s - Hannibal’s - hand disappeared down the officer's throat.

“…his tongue was cut afterward, after the money was shoved…inside. He was still alive." Will stood abruptly and, despite his relative removal from the reconstruction, found himself slightly disoriented. Will shoved his glasses back on his face and took a deep breath. Hannibal saw the slight tremor in Will’s hand, a quick squeeze of his fist, twice.

“This is less for us, and more for other killer. Murder to Murder calling card,” Will mumbled darkly.

"This is a kind of war? Fought on the battlefield of a newly-formed personal vendetta, with victims each killer considers deserving for separate reasons as the unwilling and unknowing combatants?" Hannibal asked.

Will nodded, sighing heavily.

Jack stepped forward tentatively. "Do you think this is a chance to flush both of them out?"

Will shook his head. "We should focus our efforts on the current case. The Ripper will only respond to this goading so far, and he won't take new victims that aren't related to the situation. We can't follow his lead when he's following ours. This isn't our battlefield. We don't know who the Ripper will target next to expose his foe. No, we have to go back to square one, and trace the killer as we have been, trying to figure out who they were from the Academy records."

Jack said, "At least that's a part of this puzzle the Ripper doesn't have access to."

Hannibal smiled out of Jack's line of sight, and said "Quite right."

Chapter End Notes

Sorry we take so long to update and thanks for sticking with us!

Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

A plan is in place, and events are set in motion to protect Hannibal from exposure.

The next few days held a steady pace of plans and discussion. It had to go off without a hitch - any misstep, or failed misdirection, and they ran the risk of not only missing the window to draw out the killers, but exposing Hannibal in the process.

The thought of the latter weighed heavily on Will. Sullen and withdrawn, he was rough around the edges in a way that made him ache for uninterrupted sleep and dreamless nights. He arrived at Hannibal's in the afternoon - unshaven and unkempt.

"It helps me blend in, where we'll be going." Will said by way of an explanation when he saw Hannibal take in the sight of him. "That's obviously a lie. I just haven't bothered." A few stacks of paper were taken from his bag before Will tossed it on the floor in the back foyer. He slipped into the kitchen. Rubbing his neck, he sighed as he slid into one of the chairs at the kitchen island.

Will started to say something, but was distracted by Hannibal's form at the range.

"…you're cooking? Now? What the hell is that, a four-course meal?"

Hannibal sniffed in displeasure.

"There is always time for cooking."

Will laughed, despite himself and saw a flash of teeth behind the curved smirk of Hannibal's lips as he joined him at the table.

"I've been making notes from files at the Academy," Will said, gesturing to the papers before them. "Trying to pinpoint possible places where they're choosing their victims. I've kept this from Jack, I didn't want to risk exposing where we might be." Hannibal shifted beside him; Will could feel he was pleased by the secrecy.

"They're close, Hannibal. Some of the places aren't far from here. Run-down areas of town. Back alleys. Bleak. Dark. Even when the sun is out. These people are expendable, something to throw away." Will craned his neck back and looked at Hannibal. "Or someone to gut and throw in a swamp."

Hannibal made a noise of agreement and clasped a large hand over Will's shoulder as he turned back to the papers.

“I’ve narrowed it down to just a few places. We have to go there. I need to get a feel for… this.” Will waved a hand expressively and Hannibal nodded.

“Of course, Will. Tonight, after we eat."

Will stuttered, dismayed, but smiled darkly at the thought that bloomed in his mind, “Of course, there’s always time for cooking…"

Much of their hunting would have to be carried out at night. Hannibal realized that would interfere with their intimacy and regular meals for a while, so in his mind, this was completely necessary.

Over dinner, Will shared his plans. They would drive to the areas they wanted to investigate, and leave Will's car out of sight. Hannibal would wait with it; his appearance would rouse too much suspicion in the people they were going to be dealing with, but Will knew Hannibal would insist on being within shouting distance.

They sent out a few nights in a row without much luck. Because of rumors of disappearances, it was difficult to get anyone to talk. They stayed out until three or four in the morning, and both went about their daily lives as well as they could on so little sleep.

On the fourth night they went to an underpass that Will knew to be a place where homeless people congregated. An woman in her 60's who looked much older from years of hard living seemed to be nominally in charge. There were people gathered there of all ages, some looking to be as young as fifteen. Unlike all the other people who were unwilling to talk, this woman, who called herself Aunt Sally, was grateful-but-angry that someone was starting to take the whispers of street kids vanishing without a trace. Will didn't want to tell her he knew that they probably were all dead.

"How long has this been going on?" he asked.

"Maybe two years ago this summer it started. It's not weird for people to take off, or maybe overdose somewhere that no one saw, but I've been on the streets for a decade, and it's more people going missing than can be accounted for, if it's that."

"You have any idea where they go? Or if someone they trust has been setting them up? What changed two years ago?"

She thought for a minute, and seemed to make a connection.

"I never did put two and two together before, but around the same time, this new lawyer, public defender, came around. They send someone new in every couple years, after the old one gets worn out of it. These kids get minor arrests and tickets, drugs, solicitation, loitering, shoplifting, nothing too bad. The lawyers that take that gig are either idealists or trying to pay off gambling debts, haha."

“Mm.” He tipped a shoulder in sympathy even as he felt his heart hammering in his chest.

She gave him a hard, lingering look as he averted his eyes, fumbling with shaking hands to right his glasses. Seemingly satisfied, she gave a curt nod, a smile gracing her weathered features before she turned back to the group. Will shoved his hands into his pockets, walking away slowly to avoid arousing suspicion.

He could see Hannibal, just a few small blocks ahead, obscured by near-darkness in a back entryway. He increased his pace, all but running now. The streets in this section of town were old, not up to code. Will shivered, despite the heat, to think of all the places someone… unsavory…could hide. Dead-ends. Alleys. Broken pavement rising up to meet crumbling buildings that formed the echoes of horrible things that had happened there in the past. There were too many spots to scan, so he kept his eyes fixed on Hannibal as he ran.

As he approached, Hannibal ducked into the car, the light from a lone, flittering street lamp suddenly bending around his imposing form. Will gasped quietly at the strangeness of the sight, only too happy to slide into his seat. He instinctively locked the doors, jangling the handle out of habit.

He was breathless, the back of his neck damp from a strange combination of fear and excitement.

Will looked over at Hannibal, gaze confident and sure the despite the little tremors in his limbs. There was the beginning of a peculiar feeling in the pit of his stomach. It stirred a faint memory of something dark and dangerous that coiled inside him, brought closer to the surface by the knowledge he had gained only moments ago.

He reached out and touched Hannibal’s leg, distracted for a passing second by the solid feel of muscle beneath his fingertips. But Will looked up then, and fixed his gaze on Hannibal.

“I know who it is,” he whispered fiercely.

Picking up on Will's strong desire to leave, Hannibal pulled away and had been driving for a few moments before asking, "Specifically?"

Will let out a breath he'd been keeping in. "I'll have to do some checking for the name, but it'll be easy to find. He's a public defender assigned to cases of the homeless and addicted. He has been setting some of them up and selling them in essence to our killers. Probably luring them with drugs. Bad enough that they get poor representation, and then this..."

"We will have to set a trap then," Hannibal said matter-of-factly.

"What do you suggest?" Will asked.

"I imagine it has been a little while since our lawyer has made any money on the side. The bodyfarm and autopsy scenarios were some time ago now. I think he would wish to have new clients to...procure for. When you obtain his name, we can pay him a visit, and gain his trust."

Will didn't ask what would happen after that. He had a feeling he already knew, and the thought settled in his mind like an anticipated experience that he was yet to fully have.

. . . . .

As he expected, it didn't take long to find out who the lawyer was, a man named Cyprus Waters. He had a small office near where Will had spoken to the homeless woman who told him about the man, in a run-down former storefront. No one occupied the condemned buildings on either side, which was ideal for making people vanish. No one around to see. *And ideal for us*, Will thought both grimly and happily.

Hannibal called him from a disposable cell phone. It was easy for him to convince the lawyer to set up a meeting to discuss opportunities, as Hannibal was sufficiently exotic-sounding to make Waters believe he had *unusual* tastes that could only be slaked by drugged runaways.

The plan was this: Hannibal would meet with him, and convince Waters he was trustworthy. The lawyer would find one of his clients that had recently scored and would be unable to physically resist. Then Will would come in through the back, and take him by surprise while Hannibal blocked his escape, should he attept to make one.

Only a few days spanned between their decision and Hannibal's meeting with Waters. Will found himself pre-occupied with the details as he busied himself at home for a night. A few new changes of clothes and other small items, and Will had repacked his bags. He slept fitfully that night, whether from the oppressive heat that wore on through the summer or too much whiskey before bed, Will didn't know.

Morning came too early and far too brightly.

A farewell to the dogs and enough food and water for several more days, and Will was out the door on his way back. He arrived as Hannibal was making preparations of his own, and so Will found himself alone in one of the many sitting rooms. The day loomed in his mind, his immediate thoughts consumed by it. He descended into himself, curiosity and dread and a mounting dark excitement roiling in the pit of his stomach. Focused so internally, Will failed to notice Hannibal watching him from the entryway.

Hannibal wanted to go to him, put his hand on his shoulder; instead he called to Will, not wanting to startle him. It took a few times to rouse him out of his intense quiet.

He went to him when he finally looked up, and sat beside him.

"This will be difficult. At least at first."

"That's pretty much what I'm afraid of," Will replied.

"When the time comes, you will act without thinking. Instinctively, you will know what to do. You are protecting both of us."

Will stared off into the distance for a moment, letting the truth of this settle over his mind like a blanket of snow did on a dark winter landscape.

"When are you meeting with him?"

"In two hours. It will not take him long to find us a would-be victim."

"You think this will all be over today?"

"It is likely. He will want to complete the transaction, in order to be paid in full. I will give him a third of the money he will request after I go through the motions of some deliberation and price setting. I will tell him there will be a bonus if he finds someone quickly. When I go to finalize the deal, I will have unlocked the back door, and you can take him unaware."

"You make it sound so simple," Will said flatly.

Hannibal took his hand, and pressed his lips to it gently.

"There is nothing that will come between us. That is the truth, and therefore the simplest thing of all."

Will relaxed a little, and leaned forward. He moved Hannibal's hand upwards to kiss it, taking it into his own and pressing his lips to his palm.

Hannibal's eyes were soft, as Will looked up at him, though just below the surface there lingered something dark and unnamable. Will could sense it, feel it, and for a moment he was lost in the other man's gaze - pulled into the deep with the knowledge of what was happening.

Will shivered.

He tore his gaze away, pressing the side of his face to Hannibal's open palm as a surge of adrenaline coursed through him. Pushing it down, he took a deep, steadying breath and sat up. It was too soon. This wasn't the place to let the darkness overtake him.

Hannibal sat forward with him, pressing a hand to Will's chest, and nodded. Will watched as the small smile slid away from Hannibal's face and he righted himself.

"Are you ready, Will?"

He stood, a small but purposeful nod as his only answer. They busied themselves with a few final preparations, and before Will could process it, they were leaving the house.

He looked up, having the distinct feeling that time had stopped while they alone remained unaffected. The sun hung overhead, unmoving in its indifferent arc across the sky. The trees, in similar fashion, were frozen and the birds therein were wholly silent.

"Will."

His name came through his senses as if under water.

He grunted in response and slid into the passenger seat. Hannibal grabbed his arm, hard, the sting brining him round. It was no use now, Will could feel it. The darkness, the rage, his *untamed desire* for what was to happen…he rested his head back as Hannibal pulled onto the road, and let it consume him.

This time, it was Will's turn to wait in the car when Hannibal went and met with the lawyer. He figured it would take a while, but after an hour, he was beginning to worry.

Just at the point at which Will was about to see what the problem was, Hannibal opened the car door.

"So?" Will asked impatiently.

"So, he is quite unscrupulous. Had I encountered him in any other capacity, he would surely have been dealt with by now.

Dealt with, Will reflected. He knew the meaning of that well.

Hannibal continued. "He told me I was in luck, that he had a particularly troublesome client coming by soon. Someone no one would miss. A heroin addict, who he would provide a hit to, and while they were under its effects, I would be able to transport the young man anywhere I pleased, with no questions asked."

"And how much did this lawyer sell this addict's life for?" Will asked, the tension rising in his blood at the egregiousness of it all.

"Normally the sum would be fifty thousand dollars, but I promised him an additional ten thousand due to the speed at which he will be able to procure for me."

Will looked at Hannibal's calm face. He knew that this was all part of an elaborate series of events that would ultimately end in not just protecting themselves, but removing two committed killers as well as stopping up a small part of a human trafficking pipeline. Rationally, everything was in place. Hannibal seemed to be taking all of this in stride, actions that necessity had warranted be completed. *Why am I looking forward to it so much then*, Will thought. If Hannibal was too, his face did not betray him.

Hannibal was to wait in the car until the disposable phone the lawyer had given him rang twice. They had other plans, though.

The car was positioned around a blind corner. They could see him leaving, and he would not be able to see them. Twenty minutes later, the man left, presumably to obtain the heroin necessary to subdue his client. Hannibal went around the back of the building; ten minutes later, he was back.

"The back door is unobtrusively unlocked. I doubt that he will check it upon his return. As soon as we see him reenter the building, you must go to the back and wait. I will give you a signal...there is a plant I will knock into as an accidental ruse. When you hear the noise, you will know. It is time."

Will responded, by way a slight nod.

Time slowed. Time raced. The cycle repeated, the minutes ticking by in a strange progression. Neither man spoke, though with a stolen glance, Will saw the same calm expression upon his face. Will let his breathing sync with Hannibal’s, and the slow, deliberate

rhythm helped calm him. The frantic need to do something, *anything*, was put at bay and for a long while Will simply drifted in the present moment.

He constructed the interior of the building in his mind while they waited, imaging where the "client" might sit. He saw what was surely a small waiting room obscured from the main office. Several more minutes passed, Will seeing in his mind's eye the young man shooting up, slumping to the side in drugged haze.

The lawyer returned moments later, a slight, nervous young man in tow.

Hannibal caught Will's gaze, briefly, and Will saw the cold, calculated darkness pass through his eyes. His own base nature hummed in sympathy, in anticipation…in *delight* of what was about to happen. He slipped out of the car, positioning himself near the back, and waited.

Their voices could be heard faintly through the thin walls. Will carefully leant back against dirty drywall, intent on feeling the vibration of Hannibal's impending stumble, in case the noise wasn't as loud as anticipated. His mind drifted while he stood there, and Will found himself wading into a forest creek, fly rod in tow.

It was crisp and cool, so different than the muggy and oppressive heat outside. A breeze slipped by in the constructed daydream, rustling the trees near the bank. The sound blended with the soft voices in the next room, as Will slipped into the stream, cold water pooling up to his knees and around the waders.

He threw his line back, watching the fly as it shot through the air. It sank with a brief ripple upon the surface before a deep and sudden noise reverberated through the water. The scene dissolved immediately and without a conscious thought Will was striding confidently to the adjoining room.

With a quick turn of the dirty brass doorknob, Will entered and grinned, a dreadfully under-watered ficus laying on the floor in a mound of dry dirt. His heart danced, rage and a dark unbridled joy causing his arms to flex in anticipation of the movements that followed. The lawyer, started by the falling plant and the sudden entrance of Will, stood nearly immobilized in the center of the room. With a fluid motion Will grabbed him around the forearm, sending him off balance by design.

Too startled to yell, he made a soft, surprised noise as Will's hand went around his chest, trapping his arms to his sides. His other arm followed, hooked over the lawyer's neck. As if with a practiced ease, Will squeezed, the soft, unguarded flesh compressing beneath his grip.

It felt glorious. Nearly more real than any experience that came before it, save for the times he was tangled in Hannibal's arms, spread open before him in the ultimate bliss.

Will growled, teeth showing, as he struggled to control the man writhing in his arms. It was all too easy. He lifted his eyes up to Hannibal, locking his feral gaze. The darkness poured from Hannibal as he watched, rising up to meet his own insatiable nature.

Hannibal had never seen Will take a life in such controlled circumstances before; he had killed in the chaotic throes of defense, both of himself and of Hannibal. But this was

something different. He was able to observe the flash of victory that flickered across Will's face as he settled in the certainty that he would win. He savored and memorized the look of satisfaction of a righteous job well done when Will felt the lifeless body slump in his arms.

For a moment, both Hannibal and Will's pupils were blown wide with adrenaline, each as black and deep as the other's.

Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

Will feels a desperate need after killing to protect Hannibal.

For Hannibal, the moment passed slowly. He'd never forget the look in Will's eyes, the flexing of the muscles in his arm as he strangled the lawyer, with an ease and quickness that almost rivaled what Hannibal could have done himself.

He wanted to tell this to Will, to elocute on how elegant it had looked; how it had ended much too quickly; and how he would very much like to see it again. But the situation was not conducive to poetry on the art of murder. They had to get the body out to Hannibal's car before the client woke up from heroin's nod.

Will had let the man's body fall with a look of disgust, not so much at what he'd done, but at having to touch such a disgusting person.

"Will. It's time to go."

"That was...surprisingly easy, Hannibal."

"We will talk about it later. Come, open the door, and watch to ensure we are alone."

Will straightened his hair, and took a deep breath, before doing as he was instructed.

. . . . .

They got the body down into the basement, placed in a large morgue-type drawer to keep it cool before Hannibal could take the time to butcher it and prepare it for display.

Will followed, a strange mixture of excitement and satisfaction on his heels as they climbed the stairs. For a time at least the noise in his head was silenced, the constant drum of voices and visions had faded.

He had the dark thought that this might be entirely too easy to get used to.

Will grinned, eyes bright when they ascended into the interior of the house through a well-concealed stairwell. Hannibal studied him for a moment, then took him by the hand, leading them into the kitchen.

“Sit,” Hannibal inclined his head.

Two wine glasses were taken down and Will slid into one of the chairs at the marble island, watching as Hannibal twisted the corkscrew. His hands flexed, knuckles pale for the fraction of a second as he gripped the bottle. The cork came loose with the requisite sound and he set the bottle down before them to breathe.

Will turned to him as Hannibal reached out, fingers pressing gently against his temple, before sliding down to his jaw.

“What are you feeling, Will?"

He sighed deeply, eyes closing for a moment as he leant into Hannibal’s touch.

“Like I can breathe again,” he whispered, turning briefly to press his lips to Hannibal’s wrist as he slowly continued. “I was under water, when we left this afternoon. I could barely hear you. The sun wasn’t moving. It had stopped in the sky.” Will took Hannibal’s larger hand into his own, kissing his palm.

“When I killed him, strangled him, I could see the shadows moving across the blinds again. The world had righted itself."

Hannibal kissed the side of his head and Will felt the curve of his lips against his skin. He slowly extracted his hand and poured a measure of wine into their glasses, lifting his in a graceful toast. Will clinked his glass before drinking deeply, shivering from the richness of the drink and the excitement thrumming through his limbs.

“I need to take you to bed, Hannibal,” he said, fingers curling possessively over the other man’s thigh.

Hannibal arched his eyebrow for a fraction of a second before draining setting down his glass.

He took Will's hand without another word and guided him to stand. He let Will lead him, though. It seemed appropriate.

This was uncharted territory for both of them; Hannibal didn't know if he should expect to be pushed roughly against a wall, but instead Will slowly removed his jacket and tie, followed by his waistcoat, and laid them carefully against a chair.

Then he pushed him hard against the wall.

Will was delighted by the surprised exhalation of breath from Hannibal. It was so rare to elicit a response like that that Will couldn’t resist - he reached up, fingers snarled roughly in Hannibal’s hair, and pulled him into a crushing kiss. With a free hand Hannibal’s belt was undone, Will reaching inside his trousers and he thumbed along the hardening length.

He pulled back, gasping for breath, teeth closing over Hannibal’s bottom lip.

“Get undressed,” Will growled, deep in his throat as he released the other man.

Will shed his own clothes with none of the care or attention he showed Hannibal's items. He tossed his shirt and pants haphazardly into a chair. Taking a step back, he watched Hannibal start to remove his belt.

"Faster." Will was breathless, hardly able to contain himself. Advancing on Hannibal, he grabbed his belt, sliding it from the tabs with shaking hands. He hastily untied the sharp dress shoes, socks following and motioned for him to step out of his pants. Will laid them next to the other items carefully before turning on his heel.

Hannibal stood, watching, each regarding the other with a sharp gaze, pupils blown wide.

Will was on him in an instant, a quickness to his movements that was startling. He sank down on his knees, pressing his face to Hannibal's thigh and breathed deeply. Hannibal's scent was intoxicating. Will mouthed along the silk boxers that clung to him, outlining the thickness that was barely hidden behind the soft garment.

A large, strong hand found its way into Will's disheveled hair, and he looked up into Hannibal's eyes.

"I want you naked," Will whispered, voice dark as he yanked the crimson fabric from Hannibal's slim hips. He didn't wait for the other man to step out of them, Will immediately took his half-hard cock in hand.

"Fuck," he breathed, inhaling deeply again as he pressed his mouth to Hannibal's shaft. His foreskin was not yet retracted, the delicate skin still pooled over the sensitive head hidden beneath. Will pressed his own finger inside his mouth, sucking and swirling his tongue, before touching the slick digit to Hannibal's cock.

He heard a sharp intake of breath, Hannibal's body tensing in anticipation as Will slid that finger under his foreskin, groaning when he felt the wetness of pre-cum already gathering.

"You're hard already," Will hissed, staring up at the other man. "You loved watching me kill him, didn't you." Without waiting for an answer, Will took Hannibal into his mouth, swallowing in one swift motion, lips pressed hard to the base of his cock.

"Of course I did," Hannibal said sweetly. "The more of yourself you show, the more beautiful you are to me. A rare species blooming only in the darkness. Witnessed by no eyes, other than mine. How could I ever be left wanting."

He watched for a time, smiling down like a benevolent god, before letting his head drop back and enjoy the sensations.

Will sucked him harder, taking him deep in his throat. It was not an act of submission, but rather one of making him want more, a need he could play with as the evening progressed. He sat back on his heels, bobbing his head in a slow rhythm - a slight pause, a slow breath, and then pushing forward. Again and again.

There was a slight tremor that Will felt after a time, Hannibal's hips inching forward and retreating in a languid thrust. Will withdrew, almost gently, the thick length resting heavy and

full against his tongue. He pulled back, licking wetness from bruised lips, and wrapped his fingers around the shaft. It pulsed in his hand, the head already swollen and dark.

Will pressed upwards, pinning Hannibal's cock against his belly, and dipped his head. Warm breath ghosted over hot skin, and he trailed his tongue down the underside of the other man's hardness. Lower still, he took Hannibal's balls into his mouth, sucking carefully. His free hand, curled over Hannibal's hip, slid between parted thighs and found its way to his tight hole. Not yet seeking entrance, Will simply pushed eager fingers against him, the pressure in counterpoint to his sucking.

"You need to be inside me," Hannibal stated as a simple matter of fact.

Will used his tongue for a few moments more, before pulling back, and answering just as simply: "Yes."

"Take what you want. Just as you did today."

"I'm going to. You need to be relaxed and stretched for what I'm planning to do."

Will continued sucking for a few moments before insistently pushing Hannibal backwards towards the bed. When he was close enough to it, he suddenly took hold of his ankles and unbalanced him so he fell backwards. In a fluid and fast motion, he bent Hannibal's legs back and up at the knees, exposing his hole.

From this position, he could more easily tongue him deeply, and so he did.

The heat was unimaginable. A focal point of desire, Will felt Hannibal's body responding beneath his touch. He pressed in farther, bracing a hand against the other man's knee, opening him even wider.

For the briefest of moments Will retreated, sharp teeth closing over the vulnerable flesh of Hannibal's inner thigh.

"I want to hear what this is doing to you," he growled, releasing him.

Redness blossomed behind the teeth marks and Will returned to Hannibal's entrance. Penetration was easier this time, and so a finger joined Will's searching tongue, pressing insistently against the tight ring of muscle.

Even if Will hadn't expressed a desire to hear him, Hannibal wouldn't have been able to suppress a deep moan. Will quickly went from gentle probing to harsher use of his fingers.

"You...want me open. I feel it. I feel your need. It courses through you and propels your action. It is in control. Lose yourself to it."

Will nipped at his thigh again, and entered Hannibal with two, then three rough fingers. Hannibal rocked his hips into it, gripping the sheets tightly in white-knuckled fists. He wanted to show Will that he wanted this just as much. He felt his cock ache and stiffen as it leaked.

“You’re so wet, Hannibal.”

The thick length pulsed against Hannibal’s thigh at Will’s blatant observation. With one hand still thrusting into that tight heat, Will took his other and grasped Hannibal’s cock, slipping his foreskin back and forth across the dark head.

He watched Hannibal’s body tense, staring down at him with a curious darkness in his eyes. Hannibal held the gaze for a moment before his head fell back, a desperate noise falling from his mouth.

Tongue darting out, Will licked his way from the base of Hannibal’s cock to the swollen, wet head which he drew into his mouth deeply as he sucked. He continued for a few moments until he drew back and stood, watching the other man.

He motioned, with determined hand, for Hannibal to move.

“Get back to the middle of the bed and spread your legs.” Will whispered, advancing with a predator’s glint in his eye.

Hannibal permitted himself a moment to let his head dip back, and savor the anticipation of what was about to be. Then he complied, his lithe and powerful body easily drawing back to where Will wanted him.

He gripped his knees tightly and braced himself with the lower part of his back. With a small and wicked grin, he spread his thighs apart almost as far as they would go. He imagined he'd make quite a lascivious sight, and knew he was correct when he heard Will moan at the sight of him.

"This is what you want, and I feel privileged to give it to you. To see you like this. Please, Will...," he said, eyes dark and half-lidded. He opened his legs to their fullest extent. "Please fuck me."

Hannibal heard the deepest, most animalistic noise fall from Will’s lips.

He mounted the bed swiftly, in a motion so fast that Hannibal barely suppressed a gasp. Seeing Will give himself over to his true nature was intoxicating; Hannibal’s cock throbbed at the thought of it, at the knowledge of being taken.

Will settled between the parted thighs, sure and confident hands sliding up Hannibal’s sides. He leant down, taking a hard nipple into his mouth. Tongue pressed against the sensitive flesh, Will bit down, not releasing him until felt Hannibal writhing beneath his grasp.

Thumb and forefinger closed over the other nipple, just as Will pressed his lips to Hannibal’s inner arm. He bit down again, harder this time, marking the other man. In his heightened state Will’s empathy wasn’t suppressed, it magnified an untold number of times. He felt a sharp pain, in sympathy as he drew blood, followed by a rush of pleasure so forceful Will nearly fell backwards.

As he sat forward, Will snarled his hand in Hannibal’s hair, crushing their mouths together, and stole his breath away.

In one fluid motion, Hannibal wrapped his legs around Will's waist, and one hand around his ass. The other he used to position Will's cock at his entrance, the blunt head pressing insistently along the cleft.

Mouths still together, Hannibal tilted his hips upwards, and Will had no option but to lean in, one continuous thrust into tight heat that made them both sigh sharply into each other. Will bit firmly into Hannibal's lower lip; in response, Hannibal shifted again, taking Will even deeper. He wanted to foster this bestial instinct that Will so evidently possessed.

Still, he wanted Will to let go even more, so he dug fingernails info Will's ass. In response, Will pulled almost all the way out, and thrust his cock inside hard this time, enough to take the air from Hannibal's lungs. He finally relinquished Will's kiss.

"Yes, Will," he growled. "Just like that."

He snarled in response, hips snapping forward in a punishing rhythm.

Will loomed over him, dark and wild. His eyes were nearly black, their normal blue obscured by the shadows of the room. That gaze bore into Hannibal as they writhed together. Hannibal allowed it, welcomed it, as he would for no other on earth, save for Will.

Strong, sure fingers slipped over his throat; Will’s grip was gentle, but only for a moment.

His hand tightened then, the man beneath him convulsing with need. Will pulled out completely only to slam back inside to the hilt. Hannibal’s pulse hammered visibly in his neck. Will leant down to bite savagely along his shoulder, before letting sharp teeth close briefly over his throat.

Fingers pressed again into that vulnerable area, low enough that when the bruises formed, as they surely would, they’d be hidden from others’ view.

“I could kill you,” he breathed, voice quiet, like cold liquid sliding over Hannibal’s feverish skin. “You’d look so beautiful. Dying. In the throes of passion.”

Hannibal was unable to speak, so he smiled serenely in response, and thrust his hips into Will's as hard as he could.

As the hands tightened around his neck, he let the strength from Will's grasp flow from the fingertips into his body. Oxygen was being restricted; he closed his eyes and surrendered to the experience. As Will continued to drive into him, a vision penetrated his fading consciousness.

Instead of the lawyer that had been killed, Hannibal imagined himself in the man's place. He saw the determined focus in Will's eyes; drank in the righteous fury as he felt the hands around his throat, both in the image in his mind and in reality. It was dark and sweet to him, like wine on his tongue.

Very close to losing awareness, he managed at last to move his lips. Will let up just at the final second before he passed out. Will changed the angle of his thrusts to hit Hannibal's prostate. He let out his remaining breath as he began to cum, untouched.

Will growled in approval, delivering a few hard, punishing thrusts. Seeing Hannibal undone, hearing his labored, frantic breaths sent Will over the edge. Fingers wrapped around Hannibal’s hip, steadying him, he came deep and hard inside that exquisite heat. His other hand slid through the slick mess of cum splattered against Hannibal’s stomach, up over his ribs, and across his heaving chest.

He touched blindly, momentarily losing himself to the pleasure of filling Hannibal with so much semen that he was incapable of keeping it all inside. His writhing body, the pressure from his tight hole, sent the remainder of Will’s release down Hannibal’s ass and thighs. Will wrapped a wet hand around the softening cock before him, stroking slowly in time to his diminishing thrusts.

Surprisingly to him, Hannibal found that he was quite unable to move. He tried to reach out a hand to stroke Will's face, to reassure him that everything he'd done was desired, wanted; but his arm would not obey him. He opened his mouth to try to speak, and the pressure that had been applied to his throat made it painful to talk.

Will looked into his eyes, searched them, and found only acceptance. He understood Hannibal's predicament, for he had been subject to it many times himself. He took Hannibal's fingers, entwined in his own, and brought them up to his face. Hannibal smiled as he softly touched Will's jawline, his lips. Then he closed his eyes and let out a long sigh.

He wasn't sleeping, just exhausted.

With great reluctance, Will slipped out, dropping to his knees between Hannibal’s trembling thighs. The darkness within him flared. Not gone, but merely changed in form. Whereas previously there was the intent to overwhelm, to control, there remained now only the desire for connectedness. Will pressed his lips to Hannibal’s thighs, then against his sensitive, slick hole. It was all too easy to slide his tongue inside, the body beneath him open and stretched.

Will licked the last traces of their cum from Hannibal’s skin, feeling a peculiar heaviness in the other man’s limbs. He seemed to be drifting, deeply, his breath only now returning to some quiet rhythm.

Not wanting to disturb him, Will extracted himself carefully from the bed. He padded off to the en suite, returning with thick towels and several wet, hot cloths. A brief touch to Hannibal’s side, to let him know he’d returned, and then Will was cleaning him slowly.

As he passed the cloth over Hannibal's stomach, Will was certain he saw the quirk of his lips, the tug of a smile at the corner of his mouth.

“Hannibal?” Will whispered, as he rubbed absent little circles into his skin.

Opening his eyes slowly, Hannibal said quietly, "I'm here, Will."

"Your voice is..." Will was concerned how hoarse he sounded.

"Yes, I know. It will pass. You did no lasting harm. In fact, quite the opposite. I am invigorated by it, even if I do not appear to be."

Will kept on cleaning him. Hannibal looked down to watch him, absorbing the quiet depth of the moment.

"I would hope that you would be take this experience and use it to permit yourself to let go, even without the action that preceded it. We will not always find such convenient and vile individuals to dispose of."

“Too bad,” Will whispered, startled by his desire to repeat their actions. He felt calmer than he had been in weeks. Carrying the items back to the en suite, he returned momentarily and slid into bed, sitting near Hannibal’s hip. He stroked him lightly, before gently touching his neck.

Will swallowed audibly, in sympathy. Hannibal merely smiled, almost serenely.

“Before I killed him,” Will began, softly, “I was dreaming that I was fishing. It was autumn. Cool and crisp. I had walked out into the cold water, in a stream, to wait for you.”

He brushed his hand through Hannibal’s still-damp fringe, pushing the hair off his forehead. “You were going to come fishing with me.”

Will laughed quietly.

There was a contented smile from the man beneath him as his eyes slipped shut.

For many moments, Will simply watched the slow and steady breathing, the way Hannibal’s broad chest rose and the muscles beneath parted with his movements.

“Hannibal?” Will touched his forehead lightly, not waiting for answer. “I love you."

There was the unmistakable quirk of Hannibal’s lips as Will stretched out next to him and the hint of a smile as he finally succumbed to sleep.

Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

A consummation of a different sort.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The next morning, Hannibal woke to Will wrapped around him. Although he wanted nothing more than to stay in bed, feeling Will wake, there was another kind of intimate experience that they would share that day, one that required preparation and time.

"Will...we have to begin."

Stirring, and moving back, Will untwined his limbs. A slow hand ran through his hair, then down over his face, before opening his eyes. It was a particular gesture, one Hannibal associated solely with Will. It made him smile wistfully.

"I dreamed of us, Hannibal. Of the lawyer's body. We weren't cutting him up, though. We were on a beach, and he was made of sand. The tide took him slowly away until there was nothing left."

"Dreams can show us the underlying nature of our actions. When you take him apart with me today, we will be returning him to the universe, if not the sea specifically."

Will smiled. "A better state in component parts than assembled, in his case."

They shared a quiet kiss, before finally getting out of bed.

Hannibal went to the kitchen after dressing, while Will lingered behind to gather his thoughts. When he finally pulled on his clothes and wandered downstairs, he found coffee, hot and aromatic, waiting for him in the kitchen.

“I don’t think, ah, I don’t think I can eat this morning,” he said, nearly apologetically, before sliding into a chair at the marble island. He took a long swallow, cringing at the heat of his drink.

Hannibal dismissed him politely.

“Not to worry Will, we will dine later, I am simply preparing some items ahead of time."

They sat in a quiet, albeit comfortable silence. Hannibal worked. Will’s thoughts wandered.

After a moment his vision grew dark around the edges; he descended into a daydream. The first sense that filtered through was sound: there was the faint noise of Hannibal chopping something - a metallic *ting* of the knife against the marble cutting board. Will opened his eyes wide, watching in mute fascination as he stripped the skin from a severed arm. He gasped, audibly, and the scene dissolved before his testing eyes.

“Will?"

Hannibal turned, knife held expertly in one hand and in the other…a bulb of garlic.

“Nothing.” Will laughed, despite himself. A faint smiled passed over the other man’s features before he turned back to complete his task. Minutes later, he was finished, loading ingredients into containers. Hannibal washed his hands and turned around, leaning against the counter.

“Are you ready, Will?"

Will didn’t trust his voice, but he spoke anyway: “Yes. Are you going to show me what to do?”

Hannibal noted, with no small sense of satisfaction, the quiet darkness that had crept back into Will’s voice. He approached, reaching out to him slowly and brushing the tangled fringe from his eyes.

“Of course,” he responded in kind, wrapping a hand around Will’s arm as he stood.

Taking Will's arm in a gentle but purposeful grasp, Hannibal led Will to the door of his basement. Will hadn't been down there before. This was the first time that their relationship had warranted such a visit. There was nothing Will was unaware of, at least in theory; practice was another matter entirely.

Hannibal could sense Will's combination of eagerness and trepidation. More than anything, Will wanted to know Hannibal, to *see* him in his entirety. That much was clear. To have no walls between them, to experience all aspects of his life. Nothing could be sweeter, and nothing would prevent it.

The stainless steel preparation table was the centerpiece of the room. Along the wall was a sink, cutting station, and wall of hooks and strung up herbs. There was a small but imposing cast iron furnace in the far corner. Will's eyes played over it all, finally settling on the bank of drawers, so similar to those in the BAU morgue, where the body of the lawyer was waiting for them to begin their work. *Together.*

He hung back, unsure.

Hannibal strode confidently, as he always did, to the refrigeration drawer. Will watched his measured steps, the way his hand reached out, strong and sure, to pull open the metal enclosure. Time seemed to tick by slowly, as if in a dream. Will found himself next to Hannibal without even realizing he’d joined him.

A hand settled on the small of his back. Warm. Alive. Steadying.

He felt himself relax into Hannibal's touch.

"This is more than I could have dreamed, Will. More than I ever dared hope. To share this with you. For you to *see* me. You honor me by partaking in this work. I know that rationally you understand its necessity, but it is so much more than that."

Will found himself on tiptoes, pulling Hannibal down into a deep kiss. No words came to mind, only the desire to press their lips together, breath shared for a moment before Will pulled back.

“We move him, together?"

Hannibal nodded, an almost serene look passing briefly over his face as he finally opened the drawer.

Will worried his bottom lip, a rush of emotion nearly overtaking him. Before his eyes lay the evidence of what he was capable of. A small unconscious noise fell from his lips at the sight of the body before him. Hannibal seemed elated, in his own quiet way. They gazed together at the lifeless form. A palm roamed over Will’s back, a grounding pressure along his trembling muscles, before a strong hand closed over his shoulder.

“Like this,” Hannibal murmured quietly, guiding Will. They transferred the body to cart, which was rolled to the center of the room, and then to the cutting table before them.

Will reached out, fingers sliding over the stainless steel. It felt like ice beneath his heated skin. He looked to Hannibal.

“How…?” He trailed off, eager, but unsure of himself.

"First, we exsanguinate the body. It will take some time, during which we will prepare the other instruments."

A machine with a pump and two IV-type bags, but much larger, sat in the corner. Hannibal brought it over, and hooked it into the body's brachial arteries on either side.

He opened a cabinet with a number of instruments, some of which looked medical, and the others decidedly of the culinary variety.

"Come, transfer these to the instrument tray."

Hannibal began handing things to Will; some clamps, but others for cutting. These he inspected them for sharpness. Two he set aside.

"These need tending to." He handed Will what to him seemed like an ordinary knife sharpener, which of course he knew how to use, having a collection of knives himself for fishing purposes. They each took one, and the sharp sounds of their work merged in a harmonious counterpoint to the low noises of the blood machine.

Soon both their tasks and the machines' was completed. The body looked far less human to Will now, sunken and blue tinged. He began to see this labor through Hannibal's eyes; an impersonal task, on one hand, but an opportunity to change this lifeless form into something purposeful. And even beautiful.

"I will perform the initial incisions around the heart, and you will clamp it off. There will still be residual blood."

Will nodded as he picked one up, and readied himself to use it as Hannibal began to open the man's chest. He used a rib spreader, but didn't open the chest cavity very much, wanting it to still be as intact as possible. When the organ was accessible, he guided Will's hand to where he wanted him to place the first clamp.

Will was completely silent as Hannibal wrapped his fingers around his wrist.

Once in position, Will clamped the hemostat into place, the steel grooves the instrument ratcheting shut. The sound of metal on metal reverberated through the room.

“Good,” Hannibal whispered, pressing his lips quickly to Will’s temple.

“And the other, here.”

Another instrument was pressed into his palm and he did as he was instructed. As his hand approached, blood oozed from the remaining openings, sliding over Will’s fingers in all the vivid detail of his dreams. He gasped, startled less by the blood and more by the acknowledgement that was he was seeing was real. Eyes darting around the room, he blinked quickly, wondering if he were asleep.

“Just like that Will, yes.” Hannibal breathed behind him, solid and real, the motion bringing him out of his daze.

He quickly locked the hemostat and leaned his body against Hannibal’s. Long fingers, hidden behind the impersonal exam gloves, tangled with his own. Hannibal rubbed a bloodied thumb against the back of Will’s hand and saw a flash of teeth as he smiled.

“What now?” Will asked quietly.

Will followed Hannibal's gaze. It went from the scalpel he picked up to the places where the heart was clamped off. Without hesitation he cut the various connections until the organ was unmoored.

"Take it, Will. It is yours."

Will reached in, with both hands. He was surprised by the heart's weight, its firmness. Finally, the unreality of the situation abated, and he felt synched with his lover. They worked like two perfectly balanced gears now. The heart was set aside; the abdominal cavity opened, Hannibal indicating which other organs he wanted harvested.

When their work was over, Hannibal suctioned up the remaining fluids. The body was now a husk; Will handed over suture thread to Hannibal who sewed up everything except the chest.

. . . . .

They'd been summoned to the scene of the lawyer's dingy storefront office at around seven in the morning. Will was surprised the body had been discovered so early; he'd been hoping to get more than four hours of sleep, as he and Hannibal hadn't been back to bed until after they'd finished their work around three.

Once they both arrived at Jack's urgent request, travel containers of coffee in hand, Hannibal and Will were ushered past the police line.

The team of investigators were taking pictures and dusting the metal drop-down gate for fingerprints.

"How do you suppose he did this, Will?" Jack asked.

The body was mounted to the inner door of the storefront, a large wooden thing. The security door had been left up.

Will paused for a moment, giving the illusion of consideration of Crawford's question.

"The door swings inside, yes?"

Jack nodded.

"The metal gate is solid, the Ripper would easily have been able to go in from the alley, swing the door inwards, keeping the gate down. Then just open the outer one. Easy as pie."

Jack cocked an eyebrow but didn't comment on this odd utterance.

The former lawyer was mounted to the inner door by a stake through his chest, where his heart had been. Since the scene was bloodless, it was clear he'd been drained first. He was dressed in his cheap suit, opened to his midsection to accommodate the wooden implement, which was at least three feet long and as big in circumference at its widest part as a grown man's leg.

Jack beckoned him and Will approached, arm outstretched.

His ungloved hand hovered near the man’s chest and the wooden stake driven therein. The world fell away as Will closed his eyes, his hearing temporarily silenced as a deep thrumming sound filled his senses. In his mind’s eye there swung a pendulum, silver in color, synced in time to the throbbing noise that reverberated in his skull.

Back and forth. Left. Right. Again. And again.

The scene before him dissolved - Jack, Hannibal, the world itself, all slid away before his unseeing eyes.

The pendulum swung again, washing clean the former vision. He awoke with a startled gasp to a scene more vivid and real than the former. Colors brighter, sounds more clear, Will took a tentative step forward, toward the lawyer.

Hannibal watched curiously, listening to the slight increase in Will's breathing.

"This is retribution," Will said, his voice sounding very far away. "This was a necessity, for the Ripper." He motioned vaguely in the direction of the lawyer.

He looked past them, Hannibal and Jack, eyes blank as the visions played before him.

"Not so much a personal vendetta, but a payback for what he did. He preyed on the weak. A vampire. A wooden stake through the heart then. The Ripper felt the need to return the favor."

He paused.

"Tit for tat," Will mumbled, the corner of his mouth turning up.

He let out a shuddering breath, the images before him blurring abruptly. The silver pendulum swung again, another great noise rumbling through his very bones. In his mind he saw Hannibal approaching, walking swiftly and with purpose through the lawyer's office. And, as he approached, there swung another pendulum, bright gold as if the sun itself shone upon it.

They crossed again and again, silver and gold, ornate and beautiful in their design.

"The Ripper did this because," he paused, sighing deeply, fingers twitching at his sides. He started again, voice almost dreamy as he spoke. "…because it was so necessary. It was righteous."

He let out a great breath, one he didn't know he was holding. Eyes still closed, he felt the drum of Hannibal's heartbeat, the pulsing of his mind, together with his own. The two pendulums, synced, now converged as one, the light from each joining together in a brightness more intense than Will could believe.

"The arc of the moral universe bends toward him," he gasped, breaking into a wide grin.

Jack studied the odd look that had come over Will's face. It was an expression of pride that unnerved him.

"So you're saying the Ripper is an arbiter of morality now? This lawyer do something illegal you think?"

Will gathered his wits and took himself out of Hannibal's thoughts, at least enough to sound objective enough.

"I don't think he has anything against lawyers in general if that's what you're asking, Jack. He had to have done something that the Ripper considered not only rude, but unethical. I'm sure you'll find something in his records. And something that connects him to our other killers."

Crawford rubbed his chin. "Well at least we know where to start. Will, this is getting out of hand."

Hannibal had been watching, trying to not allow his face to betray his pride in the way that Will not only had handled the situation, but also how deeply beautiful and moving it was to him to witness his lover connecting to his thoughts. It was a communion that was both internal and external simultaneously.

He stepped forward and said, "Perhaps it would be best for your investigators to gather more evidence, and we could discuss what we know over dinner tonight. I believe Will would benefit from a few hours to process this experience."

Considering how strange Will looked to him that morning, Jack was forced to agree.

"Fine. Can I be at your place at seven o'clock?"

"Yes Jack," Hannibal replied serenely, "that would be fine."

Hannibal took Will gently by the upper arm, and they had one last look at the scene they had created together, before he led him away.

Will immediately went to shower when they returned home, the heat feeling oppressive despite Hannibal's air-conditioned ride. When Will joined him in the kitchen, there was a vast array of food to be prepared, already laid out on the marble island. He paused, overcome by the sheer volume of ingredients.

"All of it, for dinner?"

Will looked up at Hannibal as he joined him.

"Looks can be deceiving, of course." Hannibal swept his hand over the arrangement. "Most of these are background ingredients. Flavorings for a stock, an accent. It will be a rustic, albeit rich meal." Will shivered at Hannibal's tone, pressing back against the hand that settled between his shoulder blades.

"I will be in charge of the main course," Will smiled, expecting nothing less. "You, however," Hannibal smiled, a proud passing over his face, "will be in charge of the pâté. And, when the time comes, you will help me with the most important ingredient. Yes?"

Will nodded, pleased to be included, despite his relative reluctance to be in the kitchen in general. He thought about his own manner of cooking and what Hannibal would think of it. Maybe he would cook for him sometime. There was a little garden he'd planted early that spring that was just coming into bloom. Some root vegetables, fresh pan fish from the stream...

"Will."

He shook himself from his daydream as an apron was slipped over his head, Hannibal sliding behind him to fasten it at his waist. He was led away to another work area, a nondescript package waiting for them. Wrapped it brown butcher's paper, tied with simple string, Will watched as Hannibal sighed, pleased. A knife was passed, and Will understood he was to open it. He did so, then watched as Hannibal unwrapped the item.

Will gasped quietly, startled, even though he had prepared himself for the possibility of what lay beneath the wrapping.

“For your pâté, of course.” Hannibal pressed his lips to Will’s temple. “I’ve taken the liberty of writing out the recipe for you.” In a flourish of his hand, Hannibal produced an elegantly written note, complete with directions and small descriptive drawings. Will couldn’t suppress a smile as he took it.

“The ramekins are chilling on the second shelf, here.” Hannibal directed him to the second refrigerator before motioning to Will’s range and workstation.

Will nodded, rolling up his sleeves. He washed his hands and for a moment leant against the counter, watching Hannibal. Already falling into the meditative state he did when cooking, Will let his purposeful but graceful movements calm his own mind. After a time turned back to his own workstation. Planting his feet, Will squared his shoulders and stared down at the liver. And picked up his knife.

Hannibal watched him for a moment before beginning his own tasks. It pleased him more than he could ever say, even in his eloquent way of expressing his feelings, that they had begun this endeavor together, and would complete every step of it from start to finish as one. They had discovered the corrupt lawyer's identity; set a trap and ensnared him; ended his worthless life; took him apart in the basement and then remade him back at his office. Now they would complete the circle, preparing a meal and serving it in unison.

With a final warm smile, Hannibal ended his reflection, and retrieved the central element of the meal from its brine where it had been resting since it was removed the previous night. Normally, the preparation he intended would take more than a day, but the portion of flesh was not as large as what it would be commonly used for, such as a leg of venison or a ham.

The sounds of Will chopping and moving about the kitchen was soothing, and familiar, even if it was not a particularly common occurrence. He patted the meat dry, and checked to see that the heat was up to temperature in his small kitchen smoker. He added some alder chips, and as they began to catch, sealed the oven. It would take approximately six hours to smoke. When it was done. he would take it out and slice it paper thin. When he served it to Jack later that night, it would be completely unrecognizable as the lawyer's heart.

Chapter End Notes

The usual apologies for how long we take to update. Life has been very troublesome. Starting to get to the home stretch now. Thanks for sticking with us!

Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

Plans are made with Jack at an exquisite dinner, that Will and Hannibal make together out of their Design; Hannibal shows more of his true self to Will following a dangerous request.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“I’m not sure how I feel about saying this,” Will inclined his head toward the heart, now enclosed in the smoker, “but that smells amazing.”

Hannibal smiled, a glint in his eyes he was unable to hide, at least for Will.

“It will take a while, I suppose? Is there time for wine, before everything…” Will paused, unsure of his words. “Before everything begins?”

“Of course, Will.”

Will gathered the glasses while Hannibal disappeared to the basement wine cellar. When he returned he uncorked the bottle and took Will’s hand, leading them to one of the sitting rooms.

Time slid slowly by as Will sipped his wine. It was mild, only slightly sweet; Hannibal had clearly chosen something light so as to not cloud the taste of the upcoming meal.

“I feel strange.” Will murmured as he took a long drink, lips turning up in a smile as he swallowed. “Unafraid, despite knowing that something looms on the horizon.”

Hannibal watched him drink, eyes lingering just long enough on his mouth for Will to notice.

“An unaccustomed emotion can stir us to change. Sometimes we don’t feel the depth of the transformation until we are finished with it, or it is finished with us. I trust it is at least pleasant? You seem comfortable and relaxed, Will.”

“It feels good. Expectant. Like something I’ve been waiting for, for a very long time.” Will’s voice trailed off; he smiled when Hannibal raked a thumb along the back of his neck. His skin was warm, pleasantly so, bordering slightly on the verge of being hot. The last several days, and this one in particular had brought out a sweetness in Will’s scent. It had been intoxicating days ago, and now, now it was nearly overpowering.

Hannibal gave no indication of its effect however. He merely pressed his lips to Will's temple as he spoke.

"Indulgence should always feel good, Will. You mustn't deny yourself. We will dine together multiple times tonight, and in many ways. The fruits of your labor, with the lawyer, will be an indulgence for us both."

Will smiled faintly at Hannibal, unaware of the subtleties of his choice of words.

"We will begin displaying the feast shortly. It will take a short time and then we will dress and await Jack's arrival. Nothing too fancy, Will." Hannibal gripped his arm, almost playfully, at the incredulous look.

"No," Will echoed, "nothing too fancy."

They finished their remaining wine and Hannibal led Will to the kitchen.

He set about plating the ramekins, full of the dark and savory pâté. Arranged according to the directions on Hannibal's note, Will placed them on the serving platter just as Hannibal joined him. A heady fragrance followed him, and in Hannibal's hand there was a bundle of rosemary. He crushed a few leaves between his fingers, releasing the volatile oils. They clung to his skin as Will leant down, inhaling deeply.

"A sprig on each ramekin." Will nodded and placed them accordingly.

Hannibal looked beyond pleased as he pressed a hand to the small of Will's back, steering him toward the smoker.

"And now, Will, the main course." A feral looked passed through Hannibal's eyes, as Will eagerly looked on.

Hannibal used a kitchen towel to open the door of the small oven, as it was hot to the touch. He carefully brought out the pan inside, and set it on a piece of slate. The heart was much smaller and darker, taking on a caramelized appearance.

He motioned for Will to put the meat on the nearby slicer.

Together, they transformed it into thin slices, Will guiding the flesh as Hannibal operated the machine. When they were done, what once sat inside the chest of the lawyer now resembled a collection of oversized rose petals of the darkest red, run through with streaks of purple and cream.

Hannibal began to assemble them on a chilled plate into a flattened flower shape. The outer rim of the platter he dotted with a balsamic reduction in the shape of a crown of thorns. In the center of the "flower" he placed a garnish of tiny, blood orange beets cut to look like a real flower's stigma.

Will helped him bring it and the pâté ramekins into the dining room. Just as they had finished taking in the scene - the food, the real flowers Hannibal had used to decorate the table, the various types of wine glasses (Hannibal planned on serving four different kinds, to go with

each course, including an apéritif and one to pair with desert), they had a moment to gaze at each other before the doorbell sounded.

As Hannibal went to usher Jack into the dining room, Will sat and thought about the case. He had an idea of how they would proceed with Jack, and fully expected Hannibal would follow his lead.

“Will,” Jack said as he came in and took his seat, the chair deftly moved back and then in again by Hannibal. “You look like you’re hatching a plan. Hopefully you’ve thought of a way to catch these killers.”

Hannibal took his seat and glanced at Will, who tried to suppress a bigger smile than he had on his face.

“I do, Jack, I’m just not sure you’ll like it very much.”

Hannibal poured them all some wine, and they began to eat the pâté. Jack closed his eyes as the flavor saturated his mouth.

“Incredible, Hannibal, even for you,” Jack sighed.

Inclining his head in thanks, Hannibal met Will’s eyes as they began to consume the food, Will barely suppressing a shiver at the taste on his tongue.

Dark and rich. It was all too easy to let the flavor carry him away from the thought of what it was. But the knowledge of its origin no longer bothered him. In fact, he relished it; it was as much a part of him as it was of Hannibal.

His design. Unique and terrible in its own right, but altogether his.

The thought filled him with a clouded excitement - cerebral and corporeal at the same time. Will tore himself away from his thoughts in time to listen to Jack’s noises of delight at the meal.

After several bites, Jack asked, “I think the extraordinary deliciousness of this meal is meant to placate me for something, right?”

Will shrugged, but began to explain. “The killers want to catch the Chesapeake Ripper more than anything right? And they know that Freddie Lounds has been a thorn in his side for ages. What if we plant a story with her - something guaranteed to enrage the Ripper - and make it known to them we think he’ll go after her? I mean, of course he won’t, he’s not that stupid, but they don’t know that. Especially if we really sell it, say in public she’s gotten threats.”

“You think they’ll stake out her house,” Jack stated.

“Exactly. And Lounds will jump at the chance to be a part of this.”

“You’re right Will. I don’t like it,” Jack admitted. “But I don’t see any better kind of plan on the horizon, especially not as fast as we need one.”

“Will you want me to accompany you to talk to her?” Hannibal asked.

“No, but thank you for asking. I think it would be best if I persuaded her myself,” Jack said.

A silence descended over the table as the plan was considered.

Will found himself increasingly hungry; the thought of the main course to come was intoxicating. It saturated his thoughts the way the pâté had done to his senses only moments ago. The desire brought out a terrible need in him, one he knew wouldn’t be satisfied so easily.

He caught Hannibal’s eye for the briefest of moments, and in that fraction of a second the hidden desire blooming in his chest exploded. Will all but mouthed the word “please” at Hannibal; had his lips not given him away, the look in his eyes surely would have.

A look passed over Hannibal’s face, at once familiar and unknown to Will. It sparked in him a need so great that he wanted nothing more than for Jack to leave. Immediately. Imagination took over for a moment and Will saw himself violently pulling the man from his seat, cutlery clattering to the floor in a discordant din...

“…and the main course.”

Will looked up, startled, unaware that Hannibal and left and returned with the large platter they both had prepared.

As Hannibal served the dish, he described it convincingly as something it was not.

“Boneless beef shank, usually a difficult cut to make sufficiently tender to serve without extensive over-braising, which I find detracts from its flavor. Instead, I have smoked it and sliced it extremely thin, giving it an unusual texture.”

He plated several pieces along with the accompanying vegetables. Jack took a bite, and closed his eyes. Hannibal knew the heart slices would practically melt in his mouth. To Will, it reminded him of a kind of beef jerky, though he would never compare Hannibal’s food to something so rustic out loud.

Will watched Hannibal and Jack, eating and talking about the upcoming talk Jack would have to have with Freddie Lounds. Hannibal’s words and the rhythm of the utensils against the plates, the serving of more wine, relaxed and lulled him into contemplative thought.

Will closed his eyes briefly, letting Hannibal’s voice carry him away. A feeling of warmth spread through him, not entirely spurred by the wine, he realized. He wished again that Jack would go. Fundamentally he knew there was plans to discuss, specifics to go over, but he wanted nothing more than to have Hannibal alone.

His eyes opened, dark thoughts and visions at the forefront. Will realized exactly where his meandering thoughts were taking him. Back to the basement. Back to where he had let another few glimpses of his true self emerge. He almost spoke it aloud, almost demanded that Jack leave. But his bit his lip in time, drowning his words with another long drink.

Hannibal watched him from the corner of his eyes, a curious look passing briefly over his face. Will silenced himself again, draining his wine glass and leaning loose-limbed against the high-back chair.

I'd take Hannibal's hand, lead him downstairs, back to where we'd shared something beyond ourselves. I'd unbuckle Hannibal's belt, slowly, fingers reaching inside the silken boxers. Down on my knees, looking up...

Will shuddered at the vision of what he wanted to do, fingers drumming unconsciously on the dinner table. A strong hand closed over his shoulder as he startled back to himself, another small measure of wine poured into his glass.

Jack was unaware of the of the subtleties of the action, praising Hannibal's choice of wine instead as Will drifted off again.

Up on the butcher's table. I want to be fucked on the butcher's table. Hannibal lifting me up from my knees, a wet sound as my lips pull off his cock. I whine, wanting my mouth filled, pre-cum dripping down my chin...

To Hannibal, it looked as if Will was practically dreaming while he was awake. He did his best to distract Jack from Will's quietness, going on at length about the ingredients of the dessert that he served.

When Jack finally realized Will hadn't spoken in some time, and had barely touched the final course, Hannibal made excuses for him, pointing out the lateness of the hour and how much stress the investigation had caused him. Jack bade them goodnight not much longer after that. Hannibal showed him out, then returned and sat beside Will, who had moved to the couch in the sitting room.

"You will concern Jack if you are so quiet," Hannibal chided Will, taking his hand, and settling back as Will rested his head on Hannibal's shoulder. "But something tells me you would not have wanted to share your thoughts with him."

"I would have wanted to share them with you," Will replied.

"Will you tell me now?"

In a way, even despite their closeness and everything they had experienced, Will was glad to not have to look him in the eyes when he shared what he wanted to do.

"You've showed me so much of yourself. More so lately. And I haven't rejected it, any part of you."

Hannibal stroked Will's hair. His voice was encouraging, but soft. "No. And for that I can never express my gratitude. I would do anything to show you..."

"I know of a way, Hannibal. It's all I could think about tonight. Take me downstairs."

Though Will couldn't see it, he knew that Hannibal's eyes had darkened, the way that they always did when Will proposed something that was both erotic and dangerous.

“Your trust in me is beautiful and terrifying.” Hannibal sat with Will in the quiet of the room for several minutes before shifting to have Will sit up.

“Now?” Hannibal asked.

Will kissed him by way of an answer.

He stood, confidently, taking Hannibal’s hand and intertwining their fingers. Though Hannibal’s skills were different than Will’s empathic ones, he still felt the intense eagerness in the other man. The pull of his desire, the unbearable want, came off him in waves. Hannibal felt it, the intoxicating desire, as it coursed through him in kind.

As they approached the basement, there was falling away of layers, the few that remained, and for the briefest of moments Hannibal felt the sync of their heartbeats between their shared grasp.

They arrived at the door to the hidden bottom level, obscured in a manner as if it were a book case, like all the others in one of Hannibal’s reading rooms. Will stopped, fingers sliding down the wooden trim.

“I want to do so many things to you,” Will hissed, biting his lip to keep it from trembling. “Please, take me there, I can’t wait any longer.”

“I want to let you, Will. You and I have shared every experience. I’ve held nothing back from you. I would hope you could do the same.”

He pulled Will in for what started as an ardent kiss, but then Hannibal’s mouth travelled down, over Will’s jawline, to close over his pulse. He didn’t draw blood as his teeth closed over the flesh, but very nearly. Hannibal had to hold him, when Will’s knees all but gave way.

Will let out a shaky breath as they approached the room he remembered so vividly. He practically dragged Hannibal to the butcher’s table, dropping down on his knees in a sudden movement. Immediately his lips were on the expensive linen of his trousers, mouth dragging along the hardening curve hidden behind layers of silk.

“I need this, Hannibal,” Will groaned, a sound from deep inside him. He looked up into the dark eyes, mouth pressing back against the thickness growing beneath his lips. “More than I need anything else right now.” He reached up, fingers brushing the buckle of Hannibal’s belt.

He didn’t wait for an answer, though he could see the acknowledgement to continue. Shaking fingers finally managed to unbuckle the belt and he stepped out of his pants in a swift, graceful motion. Will’s hands were quickly on the silken boxers, tugging them down slowly until the thick, glistening head appeared.

“Fuck,” Will breathed, licking his lips.

The air felt heavy, laden with energy and significance. He pushed forward, burying his face against the soft spot of Hannibal’s inner thigh. Will drew in a deep breath, inhaling

the intoxicating scent. Musk. Spice. And something undeniably dark rose up to meet him - undeniably *Hannibal*.

Will lifted his head slightly, inching closer to what he desperately wanted. There was a slickness already gathering, so Will pushed his tongue gently against the slit. He was hungry. Unbearably so. It was impossible to wait any longer and so he leant forward, taking the shaft into his mouth. Curling his lips, he moved forward, slowly pushing at the tightness of Hannibal's foreskin.

There was an intake of breath above him, a quiet moan, and fingers suddenly found their way into Will's curls, tightening.

He paused for a heartbeat, then continued, slowly easing the delicate tissue over the sharp curve of the swollen cockhead.

Will was only dimly aware of another noise from the man above him; too focused on his task, he sucked the hardness into his mouth, finally feeling surge of pre-cum hit his tongue.

"More," Will gasped, swallowing him deeper still.

Hannibal indulged him for as long as he was able, at times watching and stroking Will's hair, but also briefly allowing his head to fall back, satisfied sighs escaping his lips as Will took him deeper.

Soon, though, Hannibal felt the tension gathering low in his abdomen. He pulled his cock, wet and surging, nearly all the way out of Will's mouth, only to ease back in again. And again.

Will was concentrating on giving pleasure, no thoughts in his mind, only the focus on needing to taste consuming him. Soon he felt the familiar sensation of Hannibal's powerful, broad hand on the back of his head, and he knew it was almost time for him to get what he so desperately wanted. He breathed in through his nose before taking Hannibal's length down deep.

His thrusts becoming harder and less rhythmic, Hannibal pressed in as far as Will could take him. He tightened his fingers in Will's hair, holding him where he wanted him, and began to cum.

Will's eyes briefly fluttered open as he drank Hannibal down, finally satisfied. Short, hard movements, followed by deep moans, rewarded his efforts. When Hannibal's orgasm began to subside, he pulled out, running his red cockhead over Will's swollen lips.

After a moment, Hannibal leant down, tugging Will's head back by a fistful of curls. He licked his lips, bruised, still slick, and stared up at the other man. Helped to his feet by a strong arm, Will reached up, crushing their mouths together. Pressing his tongue inside, he shared the final traces of cum between them before pulling back.

"I need more, Hannibal, anything you can give me." Will's voice was low, as dark and deep as the shadows that played throughout the room.

He stumbled forward, a little unsteady from being on his knees, and pressed Hannibal back into the steel butcher's table. An arm on either side, Will trapped him there, reaching up on tiptoes to claim Hannibal's lips again. There was a sharp intake of breath and Will watched as Hannibal's eyes darkened, his nostrils flaring ever so slightly from the scent of Will's arousal.

"I know you can tell. Fuck, Hannibal, please." His lips closed over the soft spot above Hannibal's collar bone. Teeth followed, the barest hint of their sharpness sinking into the unguarded flesh.

"You wouldn't deny me, would you?" Will groaned, grinding his clothed cock against Hannibal's bare hip.

Hannibal drew him in, massaging him through his pants. He tasted himself on Will's lips, his tongue fluttering against Will's as he felt him moan into his mouth. Finally, he started undoing Will's jeans, and let him continue to grind as he kneaded the muscles of his now bare ass.

Barely breaking the kiss, Hannibal moved Will back to exchange positions with him. He pressed Will back onto the table, who offered no resistance, as Hannibal removed his remaining piece of clothing, his shirt.

"I'll give you everything, Will. All that you need and more." He held Will's hands gently but firmly down as he strapped his arms into the leather shackles he'd recently fitted the table with. Not particularly practical for preparation of food, but he'd felt that they would end up here one day. He smiled as he wrapped a cord round Will's thighs, binding his legs so that he was spread widely open at the end of the table. Finally, he shackled Will's ankles. If he wanted to rock forward just a little, he could, but with his arms above his head and his knees parted, there were few movements he could actually make.

Will was trying to control his breathing, using the techniques Hannibal had taught him in the past. It was difficult to remain calm as hands traveled softly over his exposed skin. Hannibal barely touched his cock, which would twitch at the slightest contact.

"I'm going to keep you here for a while, Will. Drain you. Free you of all your nervous energy. After killing together, you need as much release as can be delivered."

Will inhaled, slowly, and nodded his approval that they begin. He watched Hannibal closely; his eyes tracked him as he moved around him. It was shadowy down where they were, but there was something other than lack of light in what he witnessed. Hannibal's eyes were shining, but dark, and tinged with red; his skin exuded heat, and once he'd taken off his remaining clothes, seemed to shine with a moonlit essence that was not caused by external light.

Will gasped, both achingly aroused and terrified by the vision before him.

Hannibal had turned his back to him, moving about in the near darkness. To Will's eye, he had nearly disappeared, the sharp angles and lines of his body softened by the deep shadows that seemed to absorb his form all too easily.

He felt his breathing increase, heard the soft whine of his lungs struggling against the adrenaline that was coursing through his body.

“Hannibal!” Will hissed, eyes wide as he saw the other man’s form completely fade into the darkness. A moment later he seemed to reappear, first the hard line of his shoulder, followed by the expanse of his broad chest. Hannibal inclined his head toward Will, the pale moonlight streaking down his naked body.

Will let his head fall back on the butcher’s table, a low, needy moan escaping his lips. The restraints held fast, despite Will pulling hard against their hold.

“Please, Hannibal touch me. Ahhh,” his body seized, almost violently, cock twitching and throbbing at the mere thought of hands against his skin. A thick pulse of pre-cum leaked from the swollen cockhead, Will lifting his head at the sensation.

“I need…” he trailed off before finishing, voice too strained against the pleasure to continue.

He hadn’t long to wait. Starting at Will’s thighs, Hannibal placed his broad, warm palms against the heated skin. Despite the flush that rose to the surface, Will still felt the heat from them. He started to calm almost immediately; the sure, deliberate pressure seemed to draw out all his nervous tension. All the way up his torso, to his chest, where Hannibal laid it on his hard-beating heart. That too slowed, and they were finally in sync.

With a confident tilt of his head that once again caught the glint in his eyes, Hannibal bent down to at first kiss at Will’s neck, then bite. Lips followed by teeth made contact with every exposed plane of his body, every sensitive thigh and nipple, until Will felt his cock leaking all the way down his hip. He raised himself into the contact as much as he could, letting himself moan and growl with no sense of shame. He felt Hannibal’s tongue clean him off from time to time.

“You’re so aroused, Will. More than I have ever seen you.” Fingers finally made contact with his aching cock. They circled the head, pressed into the slit. It wasn’t near enough contact for him. He knew that Hannibal had more for him than mere masturbation this night.

“What are you going to do to me?” he hissed through his teeth, the anticipation almost too much to bear.

Again, Hannibal straightened up, his skin luminous. His teeth flashed as he smiled.

“Open you. Make you cum. Push you farther than you have ever been into the abyss of pleasure that you know only I can create for you. You are ready.”

Chapter End Notes

Again...sorry we are so slow to update. Keeping on keeping on. A bit of a cliffhanger ending here. What do you think Hannibal has planned?

Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

Still down in Hannibal's basement, they share their most intimate experience yet.

Chapter Notes

A purely sensual chapter, a respite before dangerous plans are executed. Check the updated tags for new description.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Something about Hannibal's words made Will relax into the experience, more than he had been. He relaxed his muscles, which had been unconsciously straining against the bonds. He let his thighs fall incrementally further apart. It was something even beyond surrender; on the surface, the situation was that he was bound, and could do nothing to stop Hannibal from doing exactly as he pleased with him. But more than that, he wanted it, whatever it turned out to be.

Hannibal turned his back for a moment, attending to something that Will couldn't see in the semi-darkness. When he faced Will again, Hannibal wore the most contented smile Will had ever seen. He was breathing slowly, and Will's breath caught the same deep rhythm.

"Good," said Hannibal almost dreamily. "You will need to take measured, full breaths, all the way into your diaphragm. In through your nose and out through your mouth. Pay close attention to any tension in your body, and let it ease."

Will nodded, and did as he was told. He soon felt two slick fingers circling his entrance, and a thumb pressing into his perineum. He breathed, and closed his eyes.

As Hannibal began to penetrate him, he simultaneously placed his other hand flat against Will's lower abdomen. He worked his ass gently, sliding in and out, until he felt no more resistance. Then he added a third finger, repeating the process over several minutes. When he managed to withdraw his fingers fully, and saw that Will's hole was gaping slightly, he added a fourth.

Pressing more firmly on Will's belly, he made a low sound in his throat.

"You are doing perfectly, Will. Opening so much for me. I can feel every pulse of blood through your body. Now…make a conscious effort to relax as much as possible. You need to

have not even the slightest amount of tension in your lower body. Can you do that for me?”

Will's head lolled to the side by way of an answer.

“Good.”

Will heard the smile in the other man's voice. Hannibal seemed pleased and Will wanted nothing more than to continue pleasing him.

He started at his head, working down, thinking of each area as too heavy and warm to think about moving. Hannibal had taught him that technique once and by the time Will had reached his toes, he was in an entirely altered head space. At once both deeply relaxed and acutely aware of his surroundings, the ghost of smile passed over Will's features.

Hannibal committed the scene to memory, deciding it was a state he would want Will to return to again and again.

The heights of arousal he had reached in this way, Hannibal had scarcely seen before. Will's length lay against his thigh, the head more dark and swollen than Hannibal thought possible. He watched, transfixed, as Will's cock pulsed gently in time with his heartbeat.

A moment later a bead of fluid appeared at the slit, followed by several more, until a thick stream of pre-cum was again running down his thigh. Will's mouth dropped open, a deep and pleasured groan falling from his lips. The sensation didn't break his state of relaxation. If anything, it heightened it - Will's thighs parted the final few measures that his bindings would allow.

He lay open and vulnerable before Hannibal, his body and mind aching for whatever was to come.

Hannibal took in a few deep breaths, feeling Will's blood pulsing. This moment was the height of intimacy in their relationship. It drew out into a thread in his mind as he worked his thumb in, alongside his folded palm. He waited for Will to adjust; the smallest increase in his heart rate easy to feel. He waited until it decreased again, then pushed in another centimeter.

Their breathing flowed together as Will accepted Hannibal's hand, almost on its own, into his entrance. Though he had not been holding any tension, it felt as if he relaxed even more once Hannibal was fully inside him.

Their eyes met. Such a complete connection threatened to overwhelm them both, but they focused on each other's breathing, and the moment endured.

Will could feel some gentle movement inside him now; Hannibal was adjusting his fingers ever so gradually to form a fist that would sit exactly at Will's prostate. Once he managed it, Will's breath hitched, and his eyes fluttered shut.

“Look at me, Will. Stay here with me.”

He swallowed, and forced his eyes open. He nodded just slightly, indicating that Hannibal could continue.

With the smallest of movements, Hannibal twisted his wrist to the left, then to the right. Will gasped; they both looked at his cock, which had been most wet before. Now it was almost like he was cumming in slow motion, but the familiar tightness low in his belly that always accompanied his orgasm had only begun to build.

Will lay his head back for a moment, gasping. To Hannibal it sounded as though he tried desperately to speak, but failed. With his free hand, Hannibal wrapped his fingers around Will's upper thigh, kneading deeply into the muscle.

“You must try to breathe slowly, Will.”

Hannibal's voice sounded as dreamy and awed as Will remembered his expression to ever have been. He lifted his head a fraction to see his cock pulsing hard against his thigh, wetness coating Hannibal's fingers.

There were no words that Will could manage. He blinked back stray tears and took a deep, shuddering breath, filling his lungs as best he could. Hannibal gently rocked his fist against Will's prostate as he breathed out. A groan, that bordered more on a sob, fell from Will's open mouth as he felt his whole body seizing with pleasure.

Hannibal thrilled at the tight, rhythmic contractions of Will's hole, each involuntary pulse seemingly stronger than the last. After several moments, Hannibal stopped his careful movements, letting Will rest.

The sight before him was too beautiful for words, one he immediately committed to memory to draw on again and again. Will lay still, save for a few fine tremors that shook his restrained limbs. Hannibal couldn't resist leaning down to press his tongue to Will's over-heated skin, the taste of him more divine than he could imagine.

Will's cock, unbearably hard, twitched at the close contact, still leaking a nearly unending stream of pre-cum down his thighs.

“Perfect,” Hannibal breathed, as he caught Will's intense gaze.

Hannibal was silent after that; Will could hear the unmistakable sounds of him pleasuring himself. He drifted in and out of awareness after such a powerful orgasm, but he found himself focusing on the small sounds that Hannibal was making

After he'd gotten himself close, Hannibal finally spoke again.

“You're so beautifully open, Will. Even now. I am afraid I could not help myself...”

Will came back to focus when he realized what was about to happen. Hannibal's gasps and sighs were growing more frantic. He put his hand on Will's thigh, and spread him open even further.

“Please...,” Will managed to say, and soon after, he got what he wanted. Hannibal came hard over his gaping hole. Will could feel it flowing into him, thick and copious.

When it finally subsided, Hannibal bowed his head, his breathing deep and hard, hair down in his eyes. Will looked up at him, and thought he looked like a god that had just been made mortal.

In his own way, Will committed it to memory - one of the most amazing things he had ever laid eyes on. Beautiful. *Dangerous*. The shadows around Hannibal ebbed and flowed around his form, in sync with his labored breathing. Will latched on to the rhythm, breathing the darkness in time with the figure before him.

That union made him greedy, made his perfectly used hole want even more than Hannibal had already given him. As if reading his mind, the other man reached forward, drawing up to his full height.

Will gasped at the sight, startled, still hungry, as Hannibal's fingers pushed easily inside his body. The last few traces of cum that had leaked from his tender gaping entrance were pushed deeply inside.

When the fingers finally withdrew, Will slumped backwards, limp in his bindings. The last of his energy drained from overworked muscles and he lay unmoving, moaning weakly.

He had never felt more complete, more at one with Hannibal. His fingers curled toward him as he arrived swiftly at his side. Grasping his wrist gently, the first arm was unshackled. Hannibal held his shoulder and elbow before slowly rotating his arm against his body.

Strong fingers worked their way into the strain and after a few minutes his body tingled as the blood returned to his limbs. He rested quietly as Hannibal attended to him. Though he was aware Will was drifting, deeply and intensely, his eyes were more clear than he had ever seen them. They shared an exhausted, knowing smile, before Hannibal moved to untie his other arm.

Will could feel strong arms wrapping underneath his knees and back. He managed to entwine his arms around Hannibal's neck, even though he was almost asleep. The scent of him gave him just enough awareness to hold on as Hannibal carried him up the stairs.

. . . . .

He had lain Will on the bed, and carefully looked over his body, making sure there were no injuries from straining against the bindings. There were some minor bruises on Will's wrists, but the skin wasn't broken anywhere. Hannibal gently massaged Will's thighs, knowing they would be quite sore in the morning. He touched Will's face, marveling at how much he gave that night. He kissed Will's forehead, who barely stirred.

Hannibal let him doze while he readied the shower. About a half an hour later, he decided it was time to get Will up and properly cleaned off before they could retire for the evening.

He wanted to wake Will as gradually as possible, so he stroked his hair until Will's eyes slowly opened.

“I could feel you touching me,” Will said quietly, voice soft with relaxation. “But I couldn’t wake up.” He sighed deeply as Hannibal’s other hand trailed down his chest. “Feels good…” For a few moments Will drifted off again, but then Hannibal was helping him sit up, a hand on the back of his neck until he was steady.

Will sat at the edge of the bed.

“I feel drained.” His eyes darkened, a mischievous looks passing over his tired features, “in more ways than one.” Hannibal shared in the double meaning as Will stood. He groaned, stiffness already settling into his body.

“A moment,” Hannibal touched Will's hip and went to the wall, adjusting the thermostat downward by several degrees. “I intend the shower to be quite hot, this should help once we return to the room,” he smiled gently and steered Will into the en suite.

A plume of steam billowed out as soon as the door was opened. Immediately, Will went to the stone bench to sit and stretch his legs. The hot water cascaded down his shoulders, soothing away some of the ache.

“Come here,” he mumbled quietly, reaching out and seizing Hannibal's hand. Gripping his fingers, Will pulled him close, before resting his head against Hannibal's stomach. Despite not being able to see his face, Will knew he was smiling. He ran his hands idly over the back of Hannibal's thighs, enjoying the feel of hard muscle beneath smooth skin.

After several minutes Hannibal moved a hand, hooking it under Will's chin. He lifted his head, threading his fingers through the dark, damp curls.

. . . . .

He'd put Will to bed, and they fell asleep entangled in each other's arms. Sleep came easily for both of them; Hannibal dreamed of taking Will to a castle in Scotland he'd once stayed at. He gradually came to wakefulness just after the sun rose, and made a mental note to see if the estate was available for a short stay for them both, once all their present peril was at an end.

Hannibal knew that despite having provided such an intimate experience the night before, he'd still not given Will everything he wanted. It would not have been the right time to fuck him, then and there. But now Hannibal surmised that Will would be sufficiently recovered.

When he woke, he'd had his arm around Will's hip, while on his side, Will's back to him. As the sun began to cast a rose glow in the room, Hannibal started moving his hand lower down Will's body. Slow and gentle, so as not to rouse him yet.

He stroked his fingers up and down in the cleft of Will's ass, until he found his entrance. As he had expected, it was still quite easy to penetrate him.

Will's sleep was deep, despite being touched.

For several moments Hannibal enjoyed the feeling of his relaxed body, soft and yielding to his careful exploration. He penetrated him deeper still, pleased by the tight heat of his

entrance.

At long last he heard a noise from the prone man. His breathing had increased ever so slightly, a soft whimper tumbling from his parted lips when Hannibal curled his fingers just so. More sounds followed, quiet groans of unconscious pleasure, as his hole was gently used.

After a moments Hannibal slid his free hand down Will's hip, skilled fingers taking his soft cock in his grasp. He swiped a thumb over the silken head, listening intently to the quickening breaths of the man beneath him. Will shuddered slightly as Hannibal increased the gentle pressure against his length, but his movements were uncoordinated. To Hannibal it appeared as though Will were trying to touch himself, but his sleep-laden limbs wouldn't cooperate.

Hannibal continued his ministrations for many minutes, until Will finally opened his eyes, confused by his sleepy state of arousal. He mumbled Hannibal's name, head tipping back to rest on his shoulder.

Hannibal kissed the top of his forehead, and Will sighed and sank back deeper into his body. With some gentle adjustments of the angle of his hips, Hannibal was able to align his cock with Will's cleft.

He inched forward, searching, until he found the slickened heat. Will was still so stretched from before, he barely moaned when Hannibal pressed inside. He went slow, allowing Will to adjust to the presence of his shaft inside his body. When he was fully inside, Hannibal stilled, and sought Will's hardening length.

More kisses, more languid stroking. Hannibal waited until Will was fully erect, and beginning to leak, before he moved even a little; and even then, it was a sweet rocking that stimulated his prostate.

Will sighed, moaning quietly from the movement of Hannibal's body. It was an easy, warm arousal that flooded his senses. Though still intense, it wasn't a desperate ache as he sometimes felt; instead, Will let himself be carried along, awash in sensation.

After several moments he moved a hand, wrapping it around Hannibal's larger one that stroked his cock. Will felt no need to guide his movements, he simply wanted to feel the strength of his grip, hidden behind the soft touches to his slick length. Hannibal thumbed a particularly sensitive spot in response, right beneath the curved head, and Will cried out softly in ecstasy.

“You'll cum inside me, won't you?” Will mumbled dreamily, turning his head for Hannibal's lips as he sought out his neck. “Please?”

Kissing Will's ear, Hannibal said, sweetly, simply, and quietly, “Of course.”

He continued his gentle thrusts, paying close attention to Will's arousal. He began to speed them when the noises he made because more frantic, and his breaths deeper. Hannibal put the side of his head alongside Will's as if to absorb his very energy.

“Oh god, Hannibal, I'm so close,” he panted, and Hannibal moved faster still. He wanted the timing to be perfect.

When he felt Will reach back and grip his thigh, his fingers tightening, his quiet moans turning into a series of gasps, Hannibal went hard and fast. Quickly, he could feel Will's orgasm beginning from within his body. He finally let himself go, having held back his own release just for this moment.

. . . . .

They laid together for an uncountable time, until reluctantly getting up to bathe. When they were done, dressed and glowing at Hannibal's breakfast table, Will finally felt ready to put their plan on motion to bring an end to the killers who stalked them. While he had dressed, Will felt his resolve strengthen; nothing could endanger the connection he had found, the peace and understanding he felt in Hannibal's arms.

Chapter End Notes

Not much more left now...

Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

The plan to flush out the killers that threaten to break them apart is put into action.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Soon after breakfast, they received a call from Jack. Freddie Lounds was on board, and an article on tattlecrime.com would be published shortly that would set a chain of events in motion that would surely flush out the killers.

Sure enough, a little after 10 AM, Will got a text that said to look at her site.

KILLER PROFILE POINTS TO HISTORY OF FAILURE; CHESAPEAKE RIPPER SENDS HIS REGARDS!

The series of murders that has taken place on the East Coast in recent weeks has embroiled TattleCrime editor Freddie Lounds in its terrifying clutches.

Just an hour ago, we posted a story about recent developments in the Profiler case. After obtaining a report that proves the BAU believes many of the so-called Chesapeake Ripper cases may actually have been the work of the Profiler instead, an anonymous message was posted to the TattleCrime blog. We have been advised against posting the exact wording, but the message purports to be from the Ripper himself! He says we have incorrectly assigned some of his work to the Profiler. He actually offered his own analysis of the Profiler, saying they are too likely to have a history of failures to have been able to pull of these crimes without being caught for so long. He expressed his displeasure about the reporting of your editor, Freddie Lounds. As such, the FBI and local police will be posting watch on our residences and offices until further notice.

They read it together, and smiled.

“The killers are sure to think the Ripper will go after her,” Will said.

“We will have to see to it that he does,” replied Hannibal.

Will nodded, considering all of the possibilities. After several moments he rose, running a hand absently through his hair.

“I should try to work for a little while.”

Hannibal nodded after him.

“I’ll prepare something to eat then, when you feel ready.”

Will disappeared upstairs to grab his papers.

Breakfast came and went, as did brunch. Noon approached and like the former hours, it too slipped by without Will coming to the kitchen. Hannibal went to find him shortly thereafter. The bedroom was empty, so too the study and sitting rooms. Finally, after thinking he had left the house entirely, Hannibal found a guest room door slight ajar.

He entered carefully, pushing the door open silently, with practiced ease. The drapes were drawn, thin slivers of afternoon light cascading out from behind thick fabric. Hannibal took in the sight of Will. Papers were scattered across the bed in haphazard piles, though Hannibal discerned that some semblance of organization existed. He bent to look at them - stacks of crime data, investigation reports. All from unsolved cases.

“Ah,” Hannibal breathed quietly, a thought forming in his mind, as if the scene before him suddenly made sense.

Will lay curled on his side before him, asleep. Limbs askew, glasses clutched in one limp hand, it was easy for Hannibal to extrapolate he had fallen asleep quickly - no doubt his abrupt repose was the physical manifestation for something purely psychological.

Will looked all too inviting in his vulnerable state. He was freshly showered, Hannibal realized by scent, having slipped into the bath before starting his research. Dressed in a thin t-shirt, and a pair of stolen drawstring pants - Hannibal noticed with amusement - it made him nearly irresistible. But it wasn’t the time for that, Hannibal concluded. Instead, he reached out and touched the bare skin of Will’s side, between the shirt that had ridden up and the waistband that sat too low on his hips.

Will startled himself awake moments later, rubbing his eyes as he sat up.

“What time is it,” he asked hoarsely, looking toward the window.

“About 2 o’clock, Will,” Hannibal said gently.

Will grunted in annoyance at the hour, slipping his glasses on as Hannibal slid into bed next to him.

“How is your work progressing? What of all these papers?” Hannibal asked, despite already knowing the answer.

Will was silent for several moments.

“Unsolved cases. Similar MO to our killers. I…” he stopped, looking down at the piles of folders, “I thought maybe I’d find something. A common thread. Some of these have to be their work.” Will raked a hand through his hair, setting off a spike off curls that Hannibal

found unbearably endearing, despite Will's distress. "I should have seen it, you know. Seen a similar calling card. I don't know how I could have missed it." He frowned, clearly upset. "Maybe I was too close to it. Like seeing your own handiwork. I couldn't distance myself from it. 'Forrest for the trees,' whatever that bullshit phrase is," he said darkly.

Hanging his head, Hannibal was reminded of the physical and mental toll this was taking. With dark circle circles under haunted eyes, Will stared down at his hands as he fidgeted.

"People died because of this. Because I couldn't see what was right in front of me. I could have stopped it, before it became whatever it is now."

Hannibal caressed his shoulder for several moments. After a while he stood, letting his hand fall away.

"Join me downstairs in a bit, Will. Perhaps something more orthodox is called for at this time." Hannibal smiled gently and strode out, leaving the door open as he departed.

Will sighed, unsure of what Hannibal proposed. Eventually, however, he dragged himself downstairs to find Hannibal waiting for him in the study. Two chairs had been pulled together and it dawned on him what "orthodox" plans were in store.

Will took his seat, staring down at one of Hannibal's many ornate imported carpets. He felt exposed like this, more so than if he were naked - thin shirt hanging off hunched shoulders, bare feet decidedly out of place on a rug that was probably worth more than his car.

"Is that was this is, Dr. Lecter," he tried to sound teasing, but instead only sounded tired, "a therapy session?"

Hannibal inclined his head to suggest both that this assessment was correct, and that Will should sit.

"You have thrown yourself into your work today. It seems as if you believe you have the capacity to see beyond the confines of that which is visible."

Will met his gentle yet penetrating gaze, and finally let the air out of his lungs. As always, Hannibal cut through the miasma of his thoughts.

"Isn't that what they all expect of me? To make leaps of intuition that break open the path to the truth?"

"That is your talent and your curse, Will. But it is not bounded by time and circumstance. The obscured is seen on its own terms. Not even you can change that."

"Then what good am I, if it happens after the fact." He didn't bother phrasing it as a question. Will narrowed his eyes, looking past Hannibal and out the window of his study.

"There are many facts yet to come. The fact of other victims not yet met their fate. Including me."

Hannibal knew that was a cruel thing to remind Will of, but yet also that it would be the only thing to snap him back to the matter at hand.

Will looked up, horrified.

“You said this would work, Hannibal. It has to work.” Hannibal heard the sharp, panicked intake of breath from the other man. Will’s shoulders hunched, his eyes dark at the thought.

“And so it will. But you have to trust me. Trust that my love for you is enough.”

Now Will’s expression of dread turned to hurt.

“I do. Trust in you is almost all I have right now.”

“Enough to overcome your guilt?”

Will didn’t respond at first, all he could process was the way his head pounded as Hannibal’s words rang in his ears.

“I sometimes dream about being washed out to sea,” Will said quietly. He took his glasses off, braving an unguarded look at Hannibal. Quickly, he turned away.

The lawyer. Will thought about him often, how he had seen a vision the night they killed him. Limbs like sand, grains that scattered and sank into dark swirling water.

“Why do I dream about that? Guilt?” His chest ached now. Will wondered if he were drowning. “Does my trust in you absolve me of my guilt?”

Hannibal looked at Will’s face carefully, studying his expression. Eventually Will smiled weakly, already anticipating his answer.

“I cannot answer for you. But I think you have acted on instincts that correspond with your true feelings. At the apex of them is protecting me. You have a choice to make, Will. Succumb to the past or ensure our future.”

“There’s no choice to make then,” Will conceded.

. . . . .

Will waited.

He hated waiting, at least in circumstances such as these. It left him full of anxious dread, the kind of feeling that seemed ever-present lately. Save for the times when he was asleep in Hannibal’s bed, or his arms, it was always with him; like dark insects on an even darker horizon, legs and wings beating with a terrible frenzy…

Will shook himself.

Jack was droning on, next to him, sat stiffly in a chair. Will eyed him with sidelong glance.

“I didn’t hear you.”

Jack pursed his lips, mildly irritated.

“How many other murders? I had a notice sitting on my desk you had requested archives, cold case files, going back years. How many other murders, Will?”

Will bristled, turning back to the window.

“I have no idea how many. Enough. Enough that the damage is already done.”

He didn’t want to say it, at least not to Jack. It had already been said to Hannibal, that was enough. *”If I had seen the signs, I could have stopped it earlier.”* Words weren’t needed though, the undertone was there; it didn’t matter he hadn’t said it aloud, Jack knew what he was thinking regardless.

Will hunched his shoulders, fiddling with his glasses. They sat in a side room on the second floor of a commandeered house, agents and equipment trucked in earlier under cover of moving van. Will worried his lip, becoming more anxious as the hours passed.

“Do we have any idea how long this will take?” he asked, resuming his watch of Lounds’ house as the light faded and sunset approached. They’d be going all dark soon; radio silence in days past, Will thought idly. He listened to the muffled sounds of agents moving through other parts of the home - tinkering with equipment, making rounds. He had been on a few stakeouts before, but nothing personal. Nothing with this much on the line.

Jack flipped through a stack of reports, file folders marked as Confidential, and made a non-committal noise.

“No specific intel on that. You’re as likely to know as anything in these reports.” He tossed the papers on the table in front of them, staring at Will, blatantly eyeing him as he often did. Not accusatory, but in his heighted state, Will felt on display.

He made a derisive noise, running a hand through his hair.

Time passed, the encroaching darkness eating away at his resolve. Will was unbearably warm, shedding clothes with the dying light until he was down to a short-sleeved shirt, his jacket long-since discarded. Forehead damp with sweat, Will craned his neck, trying in vain to crack it.

He would have a long time to wait.

. . . . .

Hannibal sat in the darkest place furthest from both the house and the few cars full of agents that sat in the night. He was well used to the familiar patterns of their stakeouts, and assumed the killers would be too. They rarely remembered to cover the brambled footpaths travelled by the deer. A human could navigate these in the night, if they knew what they were looking for. The branches and small ground plants would be trampled well enough to mitigate

hazards of tripping. The most likely of places for the Chesapeake Ripper to stalk his prey, eschewing the paths where the ground was bare due to human footfalls.

He knew he had to be careful of his timing, and arrived when he thought the agents would be getting the most tired and unaware, but close enough to the end of the shift change when Will and Jack would be leaving. They would not stay past daybreak. Yet he could not be there for long, since even the FBI got things right now and again.

Settling on 4:30 AM, this gave him a period of one hour to carry out his plans. He moved silently in the darkness. He kept a long, thin-bladed knife in his hand, and did not conceal it.

He did not have a long time to wait.

Despite his size, the male half of the murderous partnership between the killers had stealth, something which Hannibal granted him with only a thought, as he felt the large hands close around his body from behind. He struggled against them to no avail. Neither of them made a sound as the first and only capture of the Ripper came to pass. Only the dull thud of a log against the side of his head reverberated in the woods behind Freddie Lounds' house, a blow that knocked him immediately unconscious.

. . . . .

Dawn approached. Will fidgeted.

After no movement at Lounds' house, he was given clearance to leave. Will exited under normal protocol, driven to his car miles away, at which point he started on the road to Hannibal's home to wait.

Steering wheel gripped tightly in one hand, Will thumbed a cellphone in his pocket with the other as he sped down the highway. He wanted to take his eyes off the road, to steal a glance at the screen, but he didn't trust his senses.

The interstate stretched out before him until eventually he turned into the long drive of Hannibal's home. Letting himself in, Will went immediately to the kitchen, expecting in his mind's eye to see Hannibal there. Preparing something lavish. Fruit on the marble island, a complicated syrupy reduction sitting fresh in a bowl, waiting to be drizzled over the top. Hot coffee, strong tea.

For a moment, Will could smell it, could all but taste it. But he blinked, and the vision before him faded away. He stood alone in an empty kitchen. Will grimaced, stealing away to the bedroom. Pristinely made, as usual, he smiled to himself as he sank into the mattress.

In the stillness of the empty house, Will concentrated on the steady drum of his heart, and finally reached into his pocket. Pulling out a disposable cell phone and turning it on, he stared intently at the screen. Many minutes passed, and finally, a singular white dot appeared.

He rose swiftly, grabbing a bag he had packed the night before, and tossed it in the car as he exited the house. Will sped off, phone perched on the passenger seat next to him. He waited patiently until finally, at long last, the blinking dot turned red.

. . . . .

The first thing that Hannibal noticed when he began to regain consciousness was not the pain in his head. That would come unbidden very soon later, as he would just as swiftly put it aside. What was first was sound. If they had been quiet, he might have opened his eyes, but the sound gave them away before he did. This was to his advantage, as he could pretend to still be out, and listen to them without them knowing.

It wasn't speech he heard, but a kind of victorious *whooping*. Which was then shushed by a second person. He focused his senses into his hearing, a kind of intentional selective perception that he could do. Not seeing allowed him to hear very acutely well; as did his sense of smell sharpen when he wanted that to be so. So, he listened.

When the first odd noise died down, he heard the breathing. It was not completely efficient. The noise-maker had some sort of breathing problem, likely due to excessive smoking. Hannibal was certain that was a man, and a big one from the sound of the lungfulls of air he was trying to take. Big ribcage. But he'd be winded easily.

The shusher was a woman. And judging by how quickly she quieted the man, she was certainly in charge. He heard them both sit down in creaking chairs. He felt their eyes upon him. They seemed to be waiting for something, but he was sure it wasn't merely for him to come to.

Hannibal moved not a single muscle and continued to allow his autonomic functions to have full control, though now he was fully awake. He assessed himself: his head lolled to the left; there was a swelling at the side, but it wasn't going to permanently damage him. He was sitting slumped in a chair, his feet bound to the legs, and his hands behind him. If he was bound to the same quality of chair as his captors were sitting in, he would have no trouble breaking it if he stood quickly and with the full force of his musculature.

He turned his attention to what his sense of smell could tell him. Lingering cigarettes, definitely. Damp, a basement door was open somewhere near. He smelled dirt and gravel on his own clothes. They'd taken him in through an old storm cellar and up into the house they were now in. Old cooking odors, sun faded fabric, ordinary dust. A lived-in forgotten place, not on any main roads.

He could not remain this way forever, because even these people would soon realize it was past time for the relatively light blow to keep him out. They had not intended to kill him, or even damage him unduly. He allowed himself to begin to stir.

. . . . .

The early-century opulence of Hannibal's home and those like it that dotted the street, fled from view. Will stole a glance in his rear-view mirror, almost too long to be safe, and saw the house shrinking into the distance. Smaller, more minute, until eventually it vanished completely behind the gentle slope of a hill.

He hit the highway, concrete slick with the last remains of the humid morning dew. It was oppressively hot, as intolerable as the morning he remembered, not so long ago, when he had

waded into a swamp and seen the first remains of the victims.

Will shook at the memory, snarling to himself at the vision that briefly overtook his sight. Blissfully it fled, quickly, his eyes readjusting to the road before him. But in its wake, in the aftermath of the remembrance, there remained a bitter and dark rage. It filled him nearly to the core, save for a swirl of cold panic.

What if I'm too late?

Will groaned, audibly, jaw clenched and hands tightening on the steering wheel. The fake leather covering whined under his grip, the waxed-cord stitching nearly splitting at the seams from the pressure. It felt impossibly *good* to feel it yield to his strength.

He stole a glance down at the phone. Disposable. Paid for with cash, just as Hannibal requested. The red dot continued to blink, irritatingly slow, indifferent to his plight as tore down the road.

Eventually the veneer of civilization faded away, replaced first with scattered farm plots and, farther on, dense forest and creeping swampland. Will knew there were houses and other structures hiding amongst the trees - backwoods dwellings, reclusive shacks, maybe the scattered remains of CCC barracks from the early part of the 20th century.

It was in this area that Will parked his car, angling it under a partially-downed tree and an overgrowth of brush. As he climbed out he grabbed the cell phone and bag, drawing out a firearm. He rucked up his shirt, depositing the pistol in his holster that pressed against his side.

An icy calm flooded through his veins, his arms flexed in dark anticipation. With quick check of the coordinates on the phone, Will slipped into the silence of the forest.

Chapter End Notes

Still a couple of chapters left! Thank you for staying with us incredibly slow writers.

Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

The culmination of all of Hannibal and Will's plans to expose the killers and protect each other from them.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Although he could hear a commotion somewhat far off - he was in the back of the house, he supposed - Hannibal still didn't move or open his eyes. He sensed the man was back in the room with him, although he had initially left when there was a knock at the door. He could hear the muffled voice of the woman talking in an excited, constant stream.

Finally he decided it was time to let his captor know that he was awake. He allowed himself to stir, moving his chin up and softly groaning as if just coming back to consciousness.

The large man came over to him and roughly grasped his jaw between thick and worn fingers.

"You keep quiet!" he demanded. His voice was dull, unintelligent, but commanding, even though it was tinged with fear.

Hannibal finally met his eyes, trying to mimic the fear in them that he now saw, making himself appear nonthreatening. He opened his mouth as if to speak, then pretended to think better of it, shrinking into himself as if he cowered before this brutish authority. This move had the desired effect, and the man let him go, stepping back with a satisfied grunt of laughter.

"The great Chesapeake Ripper, what a joke," the man spat. He went over to the door, which was open a crack, and peered out to assess the situation.

Quiet. As it should be. He muttered an approval and, turning on his heel, he walked back to Hannibal, towering over his prone form.

So too was it quiet in the thick underbrush. Will carefully wound his way through a maze of bramble and thickets, barely noticing the sting of their thorns until a particularly sharp barb sliced his cheek.

He swore softly, wiping at the blood with dirty fingers.

He was close. Agonizingly close. He had silenced his phone long ago, but he pulled it from his pocket to check the coordinates once again.

A quarter of a mile.

Somewhere close, he guessed, would be the long-ago abandoned remains of a road that led from the more sparsely populated northern part of the rural plot. *Dirt and sand and rock, by now* , Will thought. He had come in on a state path, from the south, parked and hid his car where the county still assigned a fire number to the road. But he had trekked inward, closer to where he assumed someone might come in, were they looking to avoid exposure.

Will turned sharply, orienting through the thickest, wettest part of the underbrush, cutting a path straight through the remaining marsh. The water was shin-high, not deep enough to be cooled by the earth, but instead maintained an irritatingly warm temperature as it oozed through his boots.

He maintained his clip, now completely oblivious to the growing number of scratches and welts that sprang up from the wild swamp berry thorns. And, finally, at long last, there came into view the remains of a mostly inta ct house. Now, more of a shack, Will surveyed it with sharp eyes, body and mind focused on one singular task.

Extracting himself from the underbrush, he came along the enclosure on the long side, where the windows were still in the frames and the glass had long-since clouded with age.

As he rounded the corner, silently, he saw an ill-fitting door slightly ajar.

. . . . .

There were two voices now, and Hannibal was sure that one belonged to Will. He still couldn’t make out what was being said, but Will's voice was calm, reassuring, even proud – or at least, that's how he wanted it to sound. As the people came closer, he could begin to make out the conversation.

"...knew you'd come, always knew. Only a matter of time before you determined my identity, and I knew you would come alone. This is between us, and once you tell them how cleverly I caught him, you'd sponsor me for reinstatement. Of course you know I've continued my studies since I left the Academy, so I wouldn't miss out or get rusty.

"Yes," Will replied to the woman's voice. They were just outside the door now. "You've advanced well beyond what the program would expect students to be able to do. And you'd have to get an entire medical degree to be able to perform autopsies."

"I know, I know," the other voice said as if she'd just received a particularly flattering compliment, "but that would have been the next step in my education anyway. I've lost years of training, I had to make up for it somehow."

"Will you show him to me?" Will asked as calmly as possible, as if he was only requesting to see a stamp collection, and not the most important person on earth to him, who he feared might be injured, despite her reassurances.

"My guardian is with him, the man I told you about. He's been helping me with the physical labor. Including subduing Lecter, but I swear he's unharmed. We want him to stand trial intact, and of course I never practiced any kind of cruelty when procuring my test subjects."

The woman and Will stepped into the room, and the big man who had been guarding Hannibal circled around to the back of the chair where he was bound.

"So," Will began, "this is the Chesapeake Ripper? And you know this because he was stalking Freddie Lounds?"

"Yes! And he fits your profile! His name is Hannibal Lecter. The contents of his wallet indicate that he is a Doctor. A Psychiatrist, but a quick internet search shows he used to be a surgeon. He's the right age and everything."

"And you haven't contacted anyone else?" Will asked.

She shook her head excitedly. "No! I wanted to make sure you were the first to know."

"Exactly what I would have wanted you to do." He smiled approvingly at her, nodding his head. He approached Hannibal slowly, intentionally wary.

"You're sure he's bound securely? Your guardian had no trouble subduing him?" Will looked back over his shoulder as she approached.

"No trouble. He's strong, but not overly so. Easily taken down by a blow to the head." She pointed enthusiastically to the hint of dark bruising forming over his temple. "He's unharmed though, like I said. Maybe a slight concussion, it took him awhile to wake up."

Will nodded, satisfied, before continuing.

"And the door and windows," he inclined his head to the far end of the room, "they're secured? Like the interior door to this room?" The diversion worked, the man and women both following the gesture toward the corner of the cabin. Will took the briefest of moments he was spared to swipe his thumb across Hannibal's cheekbone.

"Yes, of course," the woman answered, seemingly pleased Will had taken notice. By the time they had both turned back, Will had fisted his hand roughly in Hannibal's hair, tipping his head back. He sneered, lip curled cruelly and stared down at the prone form.

"How unfortunate," Will said smoothly, "that it has to end this way." The double-meaning was lost on the killers, but Will saw the most minute twitch of Hannibal's lips, in shared recognition of the true meaning of the words.

"What do you propose we do with him?" He tore his gaze away from Hannibal, letting go of his head, and joined the man and woman by their side.

At last, Hannibal decided it was safe to talk. He made his voice sound weak, distant. His throat was dry, and he used this to his advantage.

"Do with me? Aren't you planning on killing me? Exacting some revenge for a friend or family member I have taken from you?"

The woman, who was shorter than average height, drew herself up as if trying to make herself look bigger than she was.

"Kill you? No way you are getting off that easy. You will spend the rest of your life in prison, most likely being lower on the food chain than you're used to."

Will winced at the pun. But this was vital information that would guide their next actions. They wanted him alive. She continued:

"This is my triumph! My way back into the program! And the FBI! Isn't that right, Agent Graham?"

Will smiled warmly at her and nodded. He motioned to her large companion.

"What do you want for him?"

"I'd like him to get his janitorial job back. He misses it, and it's not his fault that he got into some scuffles there. I think helping me is redemption enough, don't you agree?"

"Of course," Will said.

"What should we do next? Interrogate him?"

The very word made him sick to his stomach, his mind immediately pulling up any number of grotesque ways to accomplish that feat.

Will bit his lip, hard, to keep from making a noise. He had to keep his composure, had to maintain the facade. It was a fine balancing act, one that made his heart ache at the mere thought of it - slip into his own darkness to keep from throwing his cover, but go too far, and abandon himself to the unthinkable.

The razor’s edge.

As soon as the words entered his mind he knew it was too late. A vision unfolded in his mind’s eye before he could even hope to stop it:

Hannibal restrained, at his mercy, eyes alight as Will raised a sharpened blade to his throat…

Will groaned, aloud, pained at the image. Immediately, awkwardly, he coughed in an attempt to cover it, mumbling something about the heat and air outside from his trek to the cottage.

She turned to look at him, but seemed unconcerned. Will wrung his hands, a nervous gesture, but under the circumstances it looked more as if he were preparing for a fight.

Her companion grinned, obviously bored with the lack of action. Will had the overwhelming desire to gut him with his bare hands.

“What do you propose?” Will asked her, stepping forward toward Hannibal.

While she was pondering W i ll's question, he caught Hannibal's eye. It was good that no one else was watching him, because Will saw his pupils dilate and his deep intake of breath. He saw his cue to get ready to act.

Will didn't have long to wait.

A couple of heartbeats later - moments that Will would later remember as stretching out into near infinity - Hannibal flexed his muscles and let out the breath he'd been holding in for so long.

In an instant, the chair splintered as he le a pt to his feet. The ropes dropped down his body to the floor. He brought the back of his hand to the large male captor's face, breaking his nose and sending him reeling and shrieking into the wall, hard, where he hit his head with a sickening thud.

Will had managed to jump out of the way, and left Hannibal to deal with the man, as he was fast on the heels of the woman who had bolted.

They nearly collided in the far room, both of them breathless and panting. The distant sounds of something very physical happening in the adjoining space made them look at either other in horror.

"What's he going to do?"

Will's features contorted, "I'm sure he'll kill him."

She reached forward, sure fingers grasping at the tattered cuff of Will's shirt.

"I don't care! He is," she waved an arm dismissively, "expendable. All that matters is you. Us. Getting away together! Look what I've already built, with your help!"

Will stepped forward, a finger to his lips to quiet her.

"He'll hear, stay quiet."

She nodded, eager.

"Listen, we'll go. Now. While we still have a chance."

Will jerked his head toward the room where Hannibal was and her eyes naturally followed suit. In a split second he side-stepped her, arm instinctively going to her neck, the other around her waist. She made a surprised noise, eyes wide as she flailed, nails clawing desperately down Will's arm.

It was easy. All too easy. So simple to let himself go, especially at the coppery scent of his own blood as it trailed down his arm from her scratching.

But he didn't.

He held fast, easily overpowering her, but instead of ending her life, he simply interrupted it momentarily. She hit the ground with a heavy sound , knocked unconscious by a lack of oxygen. Will looked up, startled by his surroundings, as if he were emerging from a fog.

Carefully stepping over her, Will was mid-step to the door when Hannibal appear ed . In an instant his vision darkened, a singular view of the man before him coming in hyper focus.

Bloodied - his shirt, his skin, his face. Hair dark and matted, tossed over a deeply bruised cheekbone. Shirtsleeves in tatters.

"Hannibal!"

Will hissed, tripping blindly forward until his hand connected with Hannibal's chest. A horrible frenzy of beating wings engulfed his mind, worse than any of the previous times they made their appearance. Will gripped his arms, fingers digging into biceps. This had to be real; the solid feel of muscle and bone beneath his palms had to be true.

All his weight was centered forward and they stumbled awkwardly into the wall, Hannibal's back pressed up against the hard surface as Will shook violently.

"Please, Hannibal!"

Hannibal took Will's wrists in his hands, at first loosely, and then more tightly as Will began to calm just a bit. He circled his thumbs gently at Will's palms, and by degrees drew him close.

Will leaned his head against Hannibal's chest, tentatively, as if he couldn't accept that the man was made of solid matter, and not insubstantial smoke that would slip through his fingers. When his presence proved tangible, Will sank deeply into his embrace, quietly sobbing.

Once Will had regained his ability to breathe, he pulled back slightly, and Hannibal looked down at his shining, open, vulnerable eyes.

"You...have blood on you. Is it yours?" Will asked.

Hannibal smiled. "No. I am perhaps bruised but otherwise unharmed."

"I was worried that you were dead," Will said quietly, looking away. "I thought that we had come to this point, only for me to lose you. For us to lose each other."

Hannibal took Will's chin in his hand, and tilted his head up just so. He caught his gaze.

"There will come a time when we will surely be parted. Unless time itself can be defeated. But I do not think our life will be divided by anything as pedestrian as what happened here. Don't you agree?"

Will raised himself up to kiss Hannibal to tell him yes.

He lingered, a sweet and slow kiss, despite the strangeness of their surroundings. Will pulled back after a moment, and rested his cheek against Hannibal's shoulder.

"I trust you've brought the items I requested?" Hannibal stroked Will's back, even as he watched for signs that his former captor was beginning to stir. For now, she still appeared deeply unconscious.

"Yes, the small steel flask of accelerant and the ferrocerium rod," Will mumbled into Hannibal's shoulder. "And the blade." He left the implications of that item unsaid. He sighed deeply, lifting his head. "This place is going to go up in an instant. It's humid outside, but this damn thing is dry as a bone," he jerked his head toward the aging wood walls.

Hannibal clasped his hands on Will's shoulders, squaring him.

"Indeed. The burn radius should be mitigated by the swamp on all sides. The authorities will arrive in time to prevent any damage to the surrounding area. We will have just enough time to leave."

Will took a deep breath, and fished in his pockets for the flask and rod, handing them over to Hannibal.

"I'll move her outside then? We'll carry her partway back. Leave her?" He turned his head, staring at the still form. "There's really only one road in here, they'd have to find her…"

Hannibal nodded, sensing Will's concern.

"Yes, she'll be found. Go attend to her, while I attend to the inside. The burn will be as controlled as possible, given the very small amount of low-temperature accelerant, though there is still an element of uncertainty. I will watch your progress from the window, and begin once you're a safe distance away."

Will swallowed hard, reluctantly leaving Hannibal in harm's way for a second time. He left him to ignite the blaze, and to take something from the dead man; this would ensure that everyone knew the Ripper was responsible.

The cabin was out of his sight by the time he finally lay her down on the path. He scrubbed a hand over his face, sweat dripping from his forehead. The abrasions on his cheek stung from the salt, a sensation that kept his mind occupied while waiting.

Just as the panic began to rise, Hannibal came into view. He sprinted steadily, despite the heat, joining Will by his side. With a practiced ease Hannibal picked up the body, satisfied with her vitals.

"Come," he said, motioning for Will to follow, who led Hannibal in the direction of his well-hidden car. With a final look over his shoulder, Will watched as the first swirling of smoke began to rise.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for staying with us. Next chapter is the last!

Chapter 22

Chapter Summary

The case wraps up, and Hannibal and Will are free to enjoy each other at last.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Dear Agent Crawford,

I must protest the transfer of Ms. Burke out of my care. As competent as Dr. Bloom surely is with female killers, it is not up to Mr. Graham to choose one of my patient's course of treatment, and I am quite sure that he was behind the abrupt change. It has only been three weeks since she was delivered to me at the Baltimore State Hospital and I assure you the lack of progress in getting her to let go of her delusions is not a reflection on my skill as a therapist, but rather due to the need for her to adjust to her new surroundings. You are preventing a potential breakthrough by giving her over to Dr. Bloom.

Regards,

Dr. Frederick Chilton

Will read the letter that Jack had handed him with an ill-concealed smile.

"You've angered Chilton, Will. Not that I care, other than the fact that he's annoying me on a daily basis now with calls and letters since Dr. Bloom took over the case a few days ago."

"Sorry Jack. You'll have to get a letter put in her file, by an expert who agrees that she is better off with a woman. Fortunately we have Dr. Lecter to provide it."

Hannibal stepped forward and nodded.

"Dr. Chilton will only reinforce her delusions about Will, that he was somehow a part of the history of her criminal behavior. Ms. Burke clearly fixates on male authority figures and will undoubtedly eventually do so with Dr. Chilton."

Jack sighed. "If you're sure it's the only way to get her to give up these fantasies about Will, I'll back you all the way. We can't have her telling everyone Will Graham was working with the Chesapeake Ripper."

Hannibal and Will's expressions remained unreadable.

. . . . .

“It’s still so hot. It’s been years since I remember a summer this warm. Maybe since I was a kid.”

Will watched Hannibal unbuttoning his shirt sleeves, his exposed skin flushed from their outdoor dinner. He was tan, more so than usual, their fieldwork from the last several months showing on his face. Even his hair was lighter, Will noticed, blonde streaks mixed with silver, bleached by the unrelenting sun.

Hannibal regarded him with amusement as he sat down, catching him in the act of such scrutiny.

“Come, join me,” he smiled, holding out his hand. Will twined their fingers together briefly, before settling on the cushioned chaise between his outstretched thighs. Almost immediately Hannibal’s arm was around Will’s hips, guiding him backward.

“The dinner was amazing,” Will said, sated. He settled against Hannibal’s broad chest, his warm skin evident even behind the dress shirt.

“Something light, given the heat,” Hannibal smiled, rucking up Will’s thin t-shirt, “but still filling.” He settled a hand on Will’s stomach, thumb stroking slowly over the curve of his hip.

“Wine was good too,” Will mumbled, seeking out Hannibal’s free hand. He leaned his head to the side, Hannibal taking in his scent. *Clean, like rain and a pine forest*, he thought, inhaling deeply.

“Paired perfectly for the meal, I assure you,” Hannibal teased. His lips found his way to Will’s pulse; along his throat and over the arch of his neck. Will shivered, warm breath ghosting over sensitive skin.

They were quiet for a time, their breath synced with the slow rise and fall of their chests. Hannibal’s fingers strayed upward, unhurried, a large hand settling on Will’s chest.

After a while, Will finally spoke.

“The voices stopped. The noises too,” he whispered, his tone relaxed and untroubled. “A few weeks ago, when we finished the case.” He sighed deeply, kneading his fingers into Hannibal’s strong thigh.

“As I knew they would.” Will felt his confident smile, heard it in the words. He rested his head back on Hannibal’s shoulder, the other man claiming his lips in a slow, deep kiss.

During his most troubled times, lost in the horrors of his own mind, it was this connection that Will dreamt of most. Body and mind, together, with Hannibal. Pressed against one another, skin on skin, their shared darkness driving out what others threatened to take from them. How in all the world, in this one place in time they had found each other - Will dared not think of the alternative.

He moaned into Hannibal’s mouth, breaking the kiss.

“Please Hannibal, I need to be close to you.”

In partial compliance with his request, Hannibal pulled Will’s shirt the rest of the way off in one fluid motion.

Uncharacteristic for him, he tossed it carelessly aside. Will felt this gesture as if it was a spoken phrase; his instincts were validated when he felt Hannibal’s fingers dig ever so slightly into the flesh above his heart.

He arched his back, and Hannibal kissed his neck harder than before, nearly biting him.

“You’re holding back,” Will sighed quietly, breathlessly.

“I want to take this slowly. We have all night. Possibly several days. I have no upcoming engagements for the weekend. Do you?” The coy, teasing nature of his voice made Will’s pulse jump.

He smiled wickedly, to himself, and turned around, easing lithely out of Hannibal’s grasp. He straddled Hannibal’s thighs, and deftly unbuttoned his shirt. Hannibal moved to take it off, but Will complicated the maneuver by kissing down his chest each time he tried to shift.

In response, Hannibal slid a hand up his back, to entwine in Will’s hair. He gripped, firmly but not painfully, until he finally wriggled free of it.

“Aren’t you worried someone will see us?” Hannibal asked with the air of someone who wasn’t remotely concerned.

Will looked at him with wanton glee, truly at ease for the first time in months, and began to unzip Hannibal’s pants, pushing them over his hips. He lifted up and Will slid them down slightly.

“Lay back.” Will smiled, watching Hannibal sprawl backward, bringing his legs out to either side and spreading his thighs. He laughed brightly, spurred on by Hannibal’s eagerness and his own unfolding desire. With sure fingers he hooked them under the hem of the silken boxers.

He was not yet hard. His invitingly soft cock lay against his thigh, the thin expanse of tissue still stretched over the dark head. The tightness seemed to cause him a slight ache at times, as little as Hannibal ever allowed himself to show. He was open tonight though, his emotions written across chiseled features, the waning sun casting a dark shadow over his cheekbone.

With the same care that he always took in preparing Will, the favor was returned. Will gently took the whole of him into his mouth, the size still impressive even flaccid, though not yet intimidating. *That was yet to come*, Will thought dreamily, carefully easing his tongue past the tightness and beginning to gently stretch the foreskin. Hannibal sighed, relaxing even further, and threaded his fingers through Will’s curls.

“You’re beautiful, Hannibal,” he whispered, pulling back just even to speak, before inching forward again. He sucked with increasing and receding pressure, over and over, letting the

other man hear his pleasure from the act.

Hannibal's cock grew heavy as Will continued, the thickness in his mouth becoming a perfect fullness. He lifted his head, taking the length into his hand, and slowly slid a finger under the foreskin. There was a sharp intake of breath from the man above him, Will's finger skimming the sensitive flesh beneath. The tissue was looser now after the focused attention and heat from his mouth, almost ready to be slipped over the head. He savored the experience each time, when they were afforded the time to be slow and careful with one another - the act always produced such a strong reaction in Hannibal that Will would often dream about it for days afterward.

"Relax," Will breathed, lips teasing at the slit, now finally visible as the tightness in Hannibal's foreskin relented. At long last, Will slipped it back over the deep ridge of his cock, immediately taking the head into his mouth. Pressing the flat of his tongue to the sensitive area beneath, Hannibal shuddered deeply, his body unguarded and surrendering to pleasure. A long, drawn-out moan fell from his parted lips as he looked down at Will with half-lidded eyes.

Hannibal wanted this to last. He ran his fingers through Will's hair, and it made him slow down, despite his clear enthusiasm. He allowed himself to drift, once Will's rhythm had regulated. He needed this, just as much as Will did; while Will was frantic about losing him, Hannibal was inwardly just as disturbed by the thought of Will having to go through life alone. Once they'd found each other, the loss would have been unendurable, especially in such circumstances.

He found himself truly taking full, deep breaths, for the first time since the horrific bodyfarm had been discovered, and Will had taken the responsibility of it much too much to heart.

After a few moments of such indulgence, Hannibal shifted, and Will pulled back, getting the message.

"Time to go inside?" he asked, demurely drawing the back of his hand against his lips, wet and shining.

Nodding, Hannibal reluctantly sat up, lightheaded, and pulled Will in for a deep kiss before gathering his open trousers.

Inside was a blur of stairs, carelessly strewn clothes, and desperate kisses. The windows were open in the bedroom, Hannibal having prepared the darkly upholstered chamber earlier that day. Light, smooth sheets drawn back invitingly, he backed Will onto the bed, where he fell with a laugh. To Hannibal, it sounded like the resonance of a crystal glass, sounding while full of wine.

Will reclined while Hannibal removed the last of their clothing. The breeze played along his ribcage, stiffening his nipples. He was caught momentarily unaware, trailing a hand over the sensitive flesh, seeing them rise up and harden in the wake of the delicate touch. Hannibal watched, entranced. The light flush that had graced his skin outside darkened, spreading across his chest as his palm trailed downward.

Will spread his thighs, one leg bent at the edge of the bed to widen his position. Hannibal held his breath, eager as Will's hand wrapped teasingly around the hard length. He stroked himself, eager and confident, wanting Hannibal to share in his pleasure and openness.

"Let me touch you," Will groaned, his voice as dark as the night descending quickly outside. Hannibal was on him in an instant, pressed between his knees. With no hesitation Will's hand went around their shared hardness, palming a rhythmic pressure against both their cocks. He swore under his breath, shuddering at the feeling.

Hannibal's mouth was at his neck then, one hand pinned above his head as he continued to stroke both of them. Will gave in to it, pressing back against Hannibal's mouth. He felt what Hannibal felt – the ferocity of that need flowing into him, and strength coursed into his sinews, as he used his free hand to take Hannibal roughly by the shoulder. He straddled him, now on top, momentarily shocked by his own power; but he looked down, and saw Hannibal smiling up at him, and fell back under the spell of their shared experience.

Deftly, Will slid off and around, and then in a blur, each had taken the other's cock into their mouth. First they were side by side, then Hannibal was on top, then Will. When he felt Hannibal's spit-slicked finger penetrate him, he did the same. Hannibal bucked his hips a few times, then slowed. He pulled back first. Will repositioned again, and kissed Hannibal deeply as he resumed stretching and preparing him.

Taking Will's face gently into one hand, their eyes met, and Hannibal only nodded. Will sat back and found the jar of lubricant on the side table, as Hannibal brought his long legs up, knees meeting his chest, open, breathing deep in readiness.

Will groaned - a longing and needy sound that fell from his swollen lips - as he stared at Hannibal. He looked impossibly beautiful, body and mind open, eagerness written across his face. Will trembled slightly as he slicked his cock, less from anticipation (though that was certainly part of it), and more from the reverence for the act that was shortly to follow.

"You're so beautiful," Will breathed, slipping between Hannibal's thighs, who closed his legs slightly, pressing them against Will's hips. Bending forward, he claimed Hannibal's lips in a fierce kiss, crushing their mouths together. His free hand strayed, down Hannibal's side, then his ass, slick fingers seeking an entrance to his hole.

Hannibal gasped, teeth briefly closing over Will's bottom lip, bucking his hips slightly. Will grinned, breaking the kiss, and sat back on his heels. Another press forward with sure fingers, and he was opening the other man, sliding into unfathomable heat.

"Fuck," Will swore, audibly this time, thrusting in a little farther, watching in awe as Hannibal's eyes closed. He continued for a few more strokes, but now, now the anticipation was too much.

"I dream about this, Hannibal, being inside you." It was a fierce whisper, laced with such a base and fundamental need that Hannibal's heart skipped a beat. With a steadying hand on the other man's thigh, Will stroked himself again, swollen cockhead pressed to the tightness before him. He guided himself slowly, at first, teasing open Hannibal's entrance inch by inch.

Anything other than eternity in this state wouldn't have been time enough. Will choked back a sob, not yet even inside all the way, at the sheer feeling of being buried in the heat of his love. With a final thrust he sank forward, Hannibal's body closing around him with exquisite pressure.

Hannibal held Will as he drove into him, whimpering into the crook of his neck; he enjoyed the feeling of the muscles in his ass flexing as he rocked. Will kept an even rhythm, as much as he wanted to speed up. There was an unspoken understanding that this was to last.

Once it became clear that Will couldn't control his movements anymore, Hannibal held Will to him, stilling his movements.

"Will...," he said softly, and after a minute, he felt Will nodding, and then pulling back. Hannibal felt empty, but that was quickly alleviated when Will moved to his side, and replaced his cock with two fingers.

Their mouths and tongues met, and Hannibal felt need flaming in his chest, moving down to his belly, as Will continued to finger him. The kissing became fiercer, and soon Will was on his back, their positions exchanged. Fingers opened his hole, carefully but fast, and then Hannibal was thrusting inside of him.

"Don't stop," Will pleaded, and Hannibal gave in. He fucked him hard and fast, knowing all along that Will would soon be doing the same again to him. The image drove him onwards. He could see in his mind's eye Will's length thrusting into him, and it made him take him even harder.

Words soon turned to incoherent noises. Where once Will was pleading, he was now only whimpering; each noise drawn from his open mouth of its own accord, the skilled movements of Hannibal's hips urging him onward.

His climax was building, threatening to pull him down under the tide of their own unfathomable pleasure. Distantly he could hear Hannibal's labored breath, a pained lungful of air being drawn in over and over again. But, just as abruptly, Will suddenly found himself empty, Hannibal pulling out swiftly with an anguished groan.

He was too close, Will thought dimly through the haze of pleasure. Strong arms where around him in an instant, their bodies rolling together into a new position, until Will found himself between Hannibal's parted thighs. The muscles trembled visibly, his chest heaving, a desperation written across his face that Will had scarcely seen before.

"Please," he whispered hastily, his accent thick with the pretense of politeness gone.

Will plunged his fingers into his own mouth, sucking noisily and without finesse as he stared down at the other man. His free hand under Hannibal's knee, lifting slightly, he pulled his fingers from his lips and plunged them into unimaginable heat. The body beneath him shook, an almost violent tremor settling in his limbs.

The preparation was hasty, their own need outweighing anything else. With a swift and sure movement, Will gripped Hannibal's thigh, thrusting inside with a single, hard stroke.

Leaning closer, Will kissed him, deeply, and continued to thrust. Hannibal's hands roamed his back, his waist, felt the muscles flexing in his ass.

Will rocked in to him, his movements at first fluid and even, then becoming more erratic. Hannibal met each stroke, his breath growing quicker.

"I'm so ready, Hannibal. I can't wait any longer."

"Neither can I," Hannibal answered. It was then that Will realized that Hannibal was about to cum as well, just from the contact between their bodies, and from Will's cock grinding against his prostate; Will knew from experience that it must be quite intense at this angle.

"We are joined, Will, in more ways than this," Hannibal rasped between uneven breaths. "We have overcome, not for self-preservation, but for our love."

Will's mouth was at his neck, teeth on Hannibal's flesh, his lips then at his ear, sobbing incoherent words of pleasure and devotion.

In Will's mind, scenes unfolded that was longer than it took him to envision it. Traveling with Hannibal to a seaside castle...spending endless nights at home by the fire...fishing...*hunting*.

In Hannibal's mind, he saw almost the same. But for him, the daylight was tinged with gold, and the nights with iron red, always in the moonlight.

Will felt Hannibal's orgasm from within him, all rhythmic squeezing, and fingernails piercing his skin. It drew his own forth, and he kept thrusting through it, until his muscle fibers shook so hard, he fell to lay on top of Hannibal's sweat-slicked body.

His lungs burned. He gasped for air, chest heaving in the aftermath. Hot tears stung his eyes; he was still in throes of the emotional release that had followed quickly on the heels of the physical one. Will was making noise. He could faintly hear himself through his the din of his still-thundering heart, lips pressed to Hannibal's neck, moaning weakly in his exhaustion.

They moved together, Hannibal guiding them onto their sides, as Will's cock slipped from his entrance.

He sobbed quietly, pained at the loss of connection. With an exhausted arm he reached across Hannibal's hip, searching fingers sliding along the soft juncture of his wet thighs. He pressed inside the cleft of his ass, Hannibal's hole stretched and full of cum.

The sound that came from Hannibal was all the encouragement Will needed. He thrust his fingers inside, gently, settling on a lazy rhythm. Their mouths met, Hannibal seeking out Will's lips with an unuttered need of his own.

Hannibal's words echoed in Will's mind: *"...our love."*

He moaned into Hannibal's mouth at the thought of it. He broke their connection for only seconds, long enough to mumble against his lips, "I need you Hannibal. More than anything," before pressing his tongue back inside for another deep kiss.

They stayed that way, moving together, until exhaustion finally overtook them. They breathed more slowly until an uneven rhythm gave way to measured breaths, and they dozed with Will's fingers still inside Hannibal.

It was only for a few minutes. Hannibal's eyes opened slowly, and Will was still sleeping lightly. He thought that this was the single most decadent nap in the history of the world. His usual impulse to get them cleaned up, strip the bed, gave way to the desire to just stay this way until Will woke up on his own.

He didn't have very long to wait. Will came to consciousness by degrees, and he reluctantly slipped his fingers out. Gently, he moved off of Hannibal.

"You want to get up?" he asked, voice deep and gravelly from all the sounds it had made over the last hour or so.

"Do you?" Hannibal replied.

"No," Will said, almost laughing, "but we can't stay like this all night."

"I fear we have made something of a mess out of each other, Will. But not just now. Here." Hannibal moved so Will could rest his head on his chest. Will slid in close, and listened to Hannibal's heart, one of his favorite things to do.

"Yes...," he said, murmuring against the slick, heated skin, and starting to drift off once more.

Hannibal put aside his worries about the state of their bodies and the bed, as will fell asleep. *Another way you've changed me*, he thought, and allowed himself to do the same.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for staying with us through this long, long journey. There's a chance that castle Will imagined may make another appearance...

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!